DIPLOMARBEIT

Form and Function of Multiple Endings in Postmodernist Narratives

Verfasserin
Gabriele Maria NEUDITSCHKO

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Many times a day I realize how much my own life is built on the labours of my fellowmen, and how earnestly I must exert myself in order to give in return as much as I have received.

Albert Einstein

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Declaration of Authenticity

I confirm to have conceived and written this paper in English all by myself. Quotations from other authors and any ideas borrowed and/or passages paraphrased from the works of other authors are all clearly marked within the text and acknowledged in the bibliographical references.

Vienna, October 2008 ______________________________

Hinweis

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Da die Korrekturen der Beurteilenden nicht eingetragen sind und das Gutachten nicht beiliegt, ist nicht erkenntlich, mit welcher Note diese Arbeit abgeschlossen wurde. Das Spektrum reicht von sehr gut bis genügend. Es wird gebeten, diesen Hinweis bei der Lektüre zu beachten.
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0. Introduction

One beginning and one ending for a book was a thing I did not agree with. A good book may have three openings entirely dissimilar and inter-related only in the prescience of the author, or for that matter one hundred times as many endings.

Flann O’Brian, At swim-two-birds (9)

More than 2300 years ago, Aristotle defined a whole as “that which has a beginning, middle, and end” (15). But although his definition still plays an important role in our conception of literature, and even of life itself, it cannot quite be denied that to some extent the principle of constructing a whole of no more than a beginning, a middle, and an end goes against our wishes as human beings as soon as it comes to writing the narrative we call our life. Who has not at some point wished to be able to start something anew, to be able to bring some affair to a more satisfactory conclusion, or to be spared an important decision because we would rather have it both ways at the same time? We are craving to have more than one possible beginning to our lives, many middles and an infinity of endings, knowing, at the same time, that human nature and the course of time are unforgiving and never allow us to go back, let alone start something anew. But as unrelenting as real life might be when it comes to giving people second chances, there is also another sphere which is much better adapted to giving in to people’s whimsical needs and follies. Therefore, it is not at all surprising that at some point people transported their needs to this sphere called literature, and that they started writing stories with as many endings as suited them.

Nevertheless, narratives with multiple endings do not have nearly as much importance in the literary scene as might be expected. With the exception of a few examples, such as John Fowles’ The French Lieutenant’s Woman and Robert Coover’s “The Babysitter”, most narratives with more than one ending are by and large unknown to the general reading public. Similarly unknown also seems to be the fact that multiple endings are not exclusively a phenomenon to be found in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde, but that narratives with multiple endings can be found in almost any kind of literature, ranging from so-called ‘high’literature to popular literature (including Pauline Réage’s famous “Story of O”, a narrative famous for its crude display of sexual acts and violence), and also to children’s literature for all age groups. Furthermore, it would be wrong to assume that narratives with multiple endings are a phenomenon of the past, i.e. of the 1960s and 70s. Amélie Nothomb’s Mercure was written in 1998, and Keith Katchtick’s Hungry Ghost was finished as late as 2003.
In view of all of this diversity that is found in narratives with multiple endings, it is quite surprising that literary criticism should not have given this phenomenon more attention. If multiple endings are discussed at all, their critical study is mostly restricted to a few lines, and usually, multiple endings are only mentioned as a subgroup of a larger phenomenon, and never for their own sake. Douwe Fokkema, for example, mentions multiple endings as an example of arbitrary connections, which constitute an important building block of postmodernist narratives (39), while Brian McHale merely says that they are a special case of narrative self-erasure (109). It is probably needless to say that such an approach leaves significant gaps in the discussion of this interesting issue some of which will be tackled in the following analysis.

In order to do justice to the diversity of narratives with multiple endings, it has been decided to discuss multiple endings in the postmodernist avant-garde as well as in popular literature and children’s literature, covering two to three narratives per genre. While the narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde were written in the 1960s and 1970s, the narratives belonging to popular literature were written in the early 1980s, and the children’s narratives in the late 1980s, the 1990s, or as late as the new millennium. By establishing a relationship between multiple endings in different genres and looking at how multiple endings have changed during the transition from one genre to the other, one can then also determine how multiple endings have evolved over the past fifty years. Nevertheless, it has been decided to restrict the scope of narratives somewhat and to only include narratives whose endings all have the same ontological status, while excluding those cases in which one of the endings is put under erasure. Furthermore, only long narratives will be taken into consideration, excluding the whole corpus of short-stories with multiple endings. What should be revealed in this paper is, firstly, how narratives with multiple endings function, i.e. how many endings the narrative offers the readers, how the endings relate to each other structurally as well as plot-wise and how the physical structures of the narratives relate to the plots. Secondly, the functions of the endings will come under scrutiny. Of course, multiple endings can be viewed as an excellent metafictional device for reasons that will be discussed later in this paper, but it remains to be seen if they are also an apt method of heightening the readers’ sense of reality or if they can transmit values to young readers in children’s narratives. Lastly, it remains to be seen if it is not time to adapt Aristotle’s paradigm, so as to be able to say that a whole is that which has a beginning, a middle, and as many endings as necessary.
1. Definition of multiple endings

1.1 What is the ending of a narrative text?

In order to be able to accurately describe the final part of a narrative text, it is necessary to distinguish two important terms: ‘ending’ and ‘closure’. Marianna Torgovnick describes ‘ending’ in narrative as “the last definable unit of work – section, scene, chapter, page, paragraph, sentence – whichever seems most appropriate for a given text” and ‘closure’ as “the process by which a novel reaches an adequate and appropriate conclusion” (1981, 6). Porter Abbott, in contrast, gives two different definitions for the term closure. On the one hand, closure can be seen as the resolution of the central conflict of a narrative (2003, 53) and, on the other hand, as “something we tend to look for in narratives […] in the same way that we look for answers to questions or fulfilment to expectations” (2003, 59). What complicates matters even further is the fact that closure can occur on two different levels: the level of expectations and the level of questions. On the level of expectations, we recognize what we are reading as part of a particular type of narrative and then expect the narrative to obey the rules of the given pattern and to develop in a certain way. However, on the level of questions, what we want to obtain are the answers to the questions which arise during the course of the reading process (Abbott 2003, 54ff). Thus, we can say that the term ‘ending’ describes the physical part of the end of a book, while ‘closure’ refers to the level of the narrative. But although these two terms merely seem to refer to two different aspects of the same phenomenon, a distinction of the two concepts is of the greatest importance, due to the fact that narrative closure does not necessarily come at the ending of a text, or that it does not even come at all (Abbott 2003, 52). Especially in postmodernist literature, the tendency towards non-closural narratives is very prominent so that in many cases the readers are confronted with a narrative which does not give them any satisfactory sense of closure on either one or even both levels (Abbott 2005, 66).

1.2 What are multiple endings?

According to Brian McHale, multiple endings are a special case of narrative self-erasure, a technique which breaches the linear sequence of a narrative because the readers are given two or more mutually exclusive lines of narrative development at the same time (108). Narrative self-erasure can be either explicit or implicit. In the case of explicit self-erasing sequences, events are narrated and then explicitly recalled, whereas in the case of implicit self-erasure two or more states of affairs are described, but none of these are placed sous rature so that we get a narrative in which different states of affairs compete (101). On a larger
scale, multiple endings as well as narrative self-erasure (also referred to as de-narration) can be grouped into what is commonly referred to as an anti-narrative. In anti-narratives the conventions of any natural narrative are either defied or simply ignored, so that anti-narratives normally present events which are impossible in the real world without being allegorical or supernatural (Richardson 2005, 24f). Furthermore, multiple endings can be included into the group of multi-path narratives. These narratives are characterised by the fact that at certain points in the narrative the readers have to choose between branching alternatives in the text, which normally means that the plot of these texts is not subjected to a strictly linear sequence but rather allows the exploration of a labyrinth constructed by the author. Within the group of multi-path narratives there are three different sub-groups. There are texts which branch only once into two or more different directions, and in many cases, the split that takes place in the narrative is tied to some moral dilemma or an important choice that one of the characters has to make. The second type of texts are labyrinths or puzzles where the readers have to find one correct way among a multitude of misleading paths, whereas the third group is made up of fragmented works which do not offer the readers any right path (Aarseth 323f). In most cases, narratives with multiple endings can be included in the first group, although there are also more complex examples which branch more than once, such as John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*.

1.3 Why are multiple endings a typically postmodernist phenomenon?

The fact that multiple endings primarily appear in narratives which were written during or after the 1960s points to a link between the phenomenon of multiple endings and postmodernism, but what exactly is the nature of the relationship between multiple endings and postmodernism, and how can it be explained?

From a narratological point of view, multiple endings can doubtless be regarded as a device of metafiction, “a term given to fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact” (Waugh 2). As will be discussed in greater detail later, multiple endings draw the readers’ attention to the fact that they are confronted with a piece of fiction in a variety of ways, proving that multiple endings are surely an excellent metafictional device. As for the appearance of metafiction, Waugh states that although “it is a tendency inherent in *all* novels” (4, emphasis hers) it is first and foremost “a mode of writing within a broader cultural movement often referred to a postmodernism” (21). Consequently, multiple endings are intricately connected to postmodernism since they
are a metafictional device, with metafiction being “recognized as a manifestation of postmodernism” (Hutcheon xiif).

But the question can also be approached from a completely different perspective, i.e. from the perspective of social studies. In her book on postmodernist fiction, Patricia Waugh also comments on the ways in which narrative can be seen as a mirror of what is occurring in contemporary societies, and she states that “[t]he historical period we are living through has been singularly uncertain, insecure, self-questioning and culturally pluralistic. Contemporary fiction clearly reflects this dissatisfaction with, and breakdown of, traditional values” (6). The breakdown of traditional values described by Waugh can be viewed in the case of multiple endings. In this case, the long-established structure of a narrative, which traditionally consisted of no more than “a beginning, middle, and end” (Aristotle 15), is broken up in favour of a more diverse, less stable and certainly more experimental form in which the single ending is replaced by a multiplicity of endings. This certainly also ties in very nicely with what Patricia Waugh has to say about the instability of the post-modern world. While a hundred years ago the course of life for most people was determined from the beginning of their lives, the increased permeability of social classes and the breaking up of rigid structures have made the futures of the post-modern subject much more unpredictable. Race, class and gender do still play a role, but that role is small compared to the significance of those categories only a couple of decades ago. And while this breaking up of old structures is potentially beneficial for everyone who would naturally have been disadvantaged by the system, the greater possibilities have also brought along an increased instability of society, which can lead to destabilisation and anxiety of the post-modern subject. Nowadays, people are faced with a world which asks them to make decisions with the potential to change the rest of their lives for the better or the worse on a more or less regular basis, and they can never be sure to have taken the right decision. Multiple endings mirror this often uncomfortable need to choose, to never know what will be coming tomorrow and to never be able to say with certainty that we haven chosen the right path. People have become more active agents in their own lives with the ability to determine their futures, just as they have become more active readers who can direct the courses of the narratives they are reading. In this way, multiple endings do indeed mirror the “breakdown of […] traditional values” (Waugh 6) and can be seen as a manifestation of all the uncertainties that people are faced with nowadays.
2. Description of multiple endings

2.1 Discours

The first important issue to be addressed in the discussion of multiple endings is their number. According to McHale, the scale of possible numbers of endings ranges from a “minimal structure of non-endings”, such as can be found in John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* with its two endings, to a much higher number, such as the 18 endings in B.S. Johnson’s “Broad Thoughts from a Home”. This example probably borders on the maximum number of endings which can be realized in a narrative text, but there are still examples of narratives pointing to a much higher number of endings, such as John Brautigan’s *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. This narrative claims have 186,000 endings per second which, of course, cannot possibly all be realized (McHale 110). The reasons why the number of endings is important are diverse. While it has little to say about the complexity of the narrative as a whole (it would be hard to defend the notion that Fowles’s narrative is less complex than Johnson’s), it can nevertheless be seen as an indication of the metafictional potential of the narrative. This is due to the fact that the illusion-breaking effect of a narrative displaying no more than two different endings can be naturalised by the readers much more easily than the illusion-breaking effect of a narrative with a much higher number of endings the multiple narrative ruptures of which continually destroy the readers’ aesthetic illusion. Furthermore, it is certainly easier to find a link between the plot and structure of a narrative with only two endings, since the two endings can easily to be linked to some decision of the protagonist and therefore stand for the two paths a character can follow. This parallel would again be much more difficult to draw in a narrative with a multiplicity of endings to choose from.

The second important feature which needs to be discussed is the length of the endings. When we read McHale’s definition of the term ‘multiple endings’ we cannot fail to notice the discrepancy between what Brian McHale and Marianna Torgovnick refer to as an ending. While for Torgovnick the term ‘ending’ only refers to the last definable unit of a narrative text (6), in McHale’s definition it rather describes what is commonly known as ‘closure’ (108). Although there are some examples which indeed contain multiple endings, in the sense that they contain a multiplicity of units which might all function as the last unit of the narrative text, such as Robert Coover’s “The Babysitter” or Richard Brautigan’s *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, this practice is not always followed. In many cases, narratives with multiple endings use different endings for different parts of the narrative text, which is why I have decided to discuss discours before histoire due to the fact that the features pertaining to the discours of any given narrative are the features which will be noticed first by the readers. Histoire only plays a role once one has started reading and is therefore discussed here in second place, so as to follow the natural order of reading.

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1 It has been decided to discuss *discours* before *histoire* due to the fact that the features pertaining to the *discours* of any given narrative are the features which will be noticed first by the readers. *Histoire* only plays a role once one has started reading and is therefore discussed here in second place, so as to follow the natural order of reading.
**General from Big Sur**, in the majority of all cases the split of the narrative into two different strands takes place quite early in the narrative. Thus, we are dealing with a phenomenon which might more appropriately be described as ‘multiple closures’. In order to determine the period of time it takes readers to read an ending, generally referred to as discourse time, Genette proposes to indicate the number of pages an ending comprises (28f). This is, of course, an imperfect system because the number of pages cannot tell us anything about the time it actually takes to read the narrative, and due to differences in type and the physical size of the pages, the pages in different books contain very different numbers of words. Nevertheless, counting the number of pages an ending comprises can be useful because it can tell us something about the relative length of the ending in relation to other endings of the narrative, as well as to its overall length.

Another important issue that has to be kept in mind is the order in which the endings are presented to the readers. In printed narratives, the endings cannot come at the same place, meaning that the author has to impose some order onto them, and it is probably safe to assume that although a text might provide the readers with a multiplicity of endings, the ending which comes last is most likely to have some prevalence over the other endings. This phenomenon is discussed in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* when Fowles talks about the “tyranny of the last chapter”, which naturally seems to be “the final, the ‘real’ version” (390), and Douglas states that “[w]hatever comes last tends to seem like the “real” ending, [because] what reader would close the book after the “ending” encountered midway through Fowels’s novel with a bulging stack of pages and chapters acting as a reminder of what he or she is missing?” (24) Therefore, the order of the endings has much to say about their importance within the narrative. Even if the readers are asked to choose one ending over another, or to merely choose the order in which they want to read the different endings, the agency is not completely shifted from the author to the readers because it is rather likely that the readers decide to read the endings in the given order. In this way, the author can easily place emphasis on one ending while at the same time suggesting to the readers that the choice is theirs, although in fact it is not.

Another significant issue is the layout of the text and the visual as well as textual signposts which tell the readers that their narrative has just undergone a break and is about to start anew at an earlier point in the narrative. The devices which can be used to tell readers that they are about to encounter another ending are diverse. In some narratives, the endings are labelled as ‘first ending’ or ‘second ending’ (e.g. Richard Brautigan, *A Confederate General from Big Sur*), while in other cases there is an authorial comment which makes the
readers aware of the extraordinary structure of the narrative (e.g. John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Women*; M.L. Kennedy, *Kerry's Dance*; Emily Gravett, *Wolves*; Christine Nöstlinger, *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin*). Furthermore, in some narratives the different endings all start with the same sentence or set of sentences, which then act as a kind of signpost, placing the readers at the right point in time within the narrative (e.g. John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant's Woman*; Susie Gilmore, *Love Stuck*; Christine Nöstlinger, *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin*). What is important to mention with regard to this is the fact that the way in which the readers are guided by the layout of the narrative also has repercussions on the metafictional potential of the narrative. It is clear that readers will need at least some signposts in order to find their ways through the narrative, but the visual signposts which make the readers aware of the narrative split also break the aesthetic illusion and can therefore be used as a metafictional device.

Summing up, we can establish that it is reasonable to precede the discussion of the *histoire* of a narrative with an in-depth discussion of the *discours*. The features pertaining to the *discours* of any given narrative are the features which are visible to the readers when they are merely browsing through the book, whereas many of the points in discussion of the *histoire* are only discernible after a close reading of the narrative. Consequently, putting the *discours* before *histoire* conforms to the natural order of reading, but more important still is that a closer look at the structural features of a narrative and its multiple endings can reveal much not only about the relationship between *histoire* and *discours*, but also about the metafictional potential of the endings as well as their effects on the readers.

### 2.2 Histoire

Due to the fact that multiple endings mostly comprise much more space than just the final units of a narrative work, it first of all becomes necessary to ascertain at which point in the narrative the narrative split takes place. As multiple endings can be viewed as a form of multi-path narratives in which the decision for or against one or another strand of narrative is often linked to a moral dilemma, it is very probable that the narrative split will, in many cases, coincide with the appearance of a kernel, an event “that advance[s] the action by opening an alternative” (Rimmon-Kenan 16). If we further want to apply this theory to the narrative on a somewhat larger scale, it is convenient to consider the so-called Freytag-pyramid, which describes the structure of a typical five act play as consisting of an introduction, followed by an inciting moment, the rising action, the climax, the falling action and last but not least a catastrophe (Cuddon 335). When the Freytag-pyramid is applied to narratives with multiple
endings it is probably safe to assume that, depending on the length of the endings, the narrative split will either be situated at the inciting moment or the climax of the narrative. In the first case, the ending will consist of the inciting moment, the rising action, the climax and the falling action, whereas in the second case, the ending will be much shorter and contain only the climax and the falling action. What is also intricately linked to the question of the narrative split is the measurement of the endings in terms of story time. Concerning the measurement of story time, it is advisable to follow Genette’s proposition to determine the length of an ending by stating how many hours, days, months, or even weeks the action comprises (28f). Although in some cases it will be difficult to say exactly how long an action takes, the determination of story time is still a much more viable system than the measurement of discourse time because you cannot only determine the length of the endings in relation to other endings of the same narrative or the overall length of the narrative, but it also allows a direct comparison between endings in different narratives.

Another aspect that needs to be considered is that of two important binary oppositions, namely happy vs. sad ending, and open vs. closed ending. The first of the two pairs is fairly straightforward. While a happy ending refers to an ending in which the central conflict is solved in a positive way, the narrative takes a negative outcome in a sad ending. The second opposition, in contrast, is more complex. While a closed ending strives to provide its readers with closure on the level of expectations as well as on the level of questions, a postmodernist open ending denies its readers closure on either one or even on both levels. Yet, this definition is not absolute, but rather has to be seen in terms of degree since Porter Abbott argues that there can be no work which does not leave the readers with any loose ends (66), so that in the end the distinction between open and closed ending will, in many cases, be a matter of interpretation.

The categorisation in terms of happy and sad or open and closed ending is also of the greatest importance for a further point of discussion. As David Lodge also describes multiple endings in terms of variation and permutation (228), it is furthermore important to ask how far the endings are related from the point of view of the plot. Following Lodge’s assumption, it can be reasoned that one ending is always a kind of variation of another ending, i.e. all of the endings are intimately related and are all different adaptations of the same scenario. Therefore, it remains to be seen how far endings can be opposite in the terms discussed above, and still qualify as a variation of the same happenings.

Summing up, there are strong ties between the *discours* and *histoire* levels of narratives containing multiple endings. Many features which can be viewed at first sight on
the level of the *discours* point to features on the *histoire* level, which can only be found upon closer inspection. Still however, the most important connection between those two levels, a connection which is mostly based on the principle of analogy, will be discussed in the next chapter.

2.3 Interaction between *discours* and *histoire*: multiple endings as analogy

As has already been previously established, there are tight bonds between *discours* and *histoire* mainly based on analogy, which can be described as an equality of relations between different objects or systems (Metzler 15). If this definition is applied to a narrative text, it leads to the conclusion that the structural as well as the *histoire* level of a narrative must have some common denominator, i.e. that a split in the narrative can be seen as an analogy of something that is taking place within the narrative. In the case of multiple endings, the analogies can go in two directions. Aarseth states that in the majority of cases, the narrative split in a text which contains more than one ending is often tied to a moral dilemma that one of the characters has to face (323f). Moreover, one can also often find a link to a more general theme, such as freedom or a quest of one of the characters, which can be related to the readers’ quest for the “real” ending to the narrative. Douwe Fokkema, in contrast, provides a view which is completely counter to what is established by Aarseth. He classifies multiple endings as an iconic expression of arbitrary connections, a case in which the text does not conform to the rules of either logical or narrative connectivity (37). This means that there does not necessarily have to be a link between the structural level and the *histoire* level, which can then be regarded as an indication for the arbitrariness of narrative texts. But although these two suggestions go into totally different directions, it is worth investigating if they are really as exclusive as they seem to be at first sight. On one level, the narrative split might be linked to a decision of one of the characters and thus fits perfectly into Aarseth’s framework, but on closer inspection it might equally turn out that no matter what the character chooses, the outcome of the ending is only marginally influenced by this first choice. This would then make the endings appear in a new light and push them towards a classification of multiple endings as an analogy of arbitrariness. Therefore, it is safe to assume that in some cases both forms of analogy will play an important role, with the prevalence of one form or the other only being a matter of emphasis, rather than a matter of complete exclusion.
3. Functions of multiple endings

3.1 Multiple endings as a metafictional device

Patricia Waugh defines metafiction as “fictional writing which self-consciously and systematically draws attention to its status as an artefact in order to pose questions about the relationship between fiction and reality” (2). And while a multiplicity of endings will surely make the readers aware of the constructedness of the narrative, it is nevertheless important to ask if this proposition really holds true for all narratives with a multiplicity of endings. According to Brian McHale, there are two different types of multiple endings only one of which can be used as a metafictional device. The first type of multiple endings, which can be called “un-true” or “non-metafictional” multiple endings, are more likely to be found in modernist rather than in postmodernist literature. In this case, the narrative self-erasing sequences are mostly part of the sub-world of one of the characters of the plot, i.e. they appear in the form of wishes, memories or mental anticipations and therefore do not question the ontological status of the work. In the case of “true” multiple endings, the self-erasing sequences co-exist without any explanation or indication that would naturalize the illusion-breaking effect and therefore serve as a metafictional device (101f).

What makes multiple endings an especially effective metafictional device is the fact that they attack the readers’ aesthetic illusion from different angles. First of all, multiple endings draw attention to the text’s construction by frustrating the readers’ expectations of closure (Waugh 22). Closure can occur either on the level of expectations or on the level of questions (Abbott 54ff), and while some of the narratives to be discussed will surely provide the readers with satisfactory closure on the level of questions, satisfaction of the readers’ need for closure will surely be harder to achieve when it comes to the level of expectations. In spite of the fact that the narratives might satisfy the readers’ expectations in one ending, the readers can never have a feeling of complete closure due to the fact that probably none of them expect to find a multiplicity of endings. This phenomenon could also be described as the laying bare of literary conventions that readers are normally not aware of through parody or “defamiliarization” (Hutcheon 24), since a narrative with more than one ending clearly breaches Aristotles’ rule describing “a whole [as] that which has a beginning, middle, and end” (15). Let us also not forget that by writing more than one ending to a narrative, the author is able to lead his narrative into entirely different directions and to include an ending which goes totally against the readers’ expectations. As a result, a love story might come to a happy conclusion in one ending, but end with the death of one of the lovers or their separation in another. This is what Patricia Waugh calls the “undermining of specific fictional
conventions” (22), a device which again frustrates the readers’ expectations of closure and therefore breaks up their aesthetic illusion.

A second important issue to be kept in mind again comes from Patricia Waugh. According to her, multiple endings constitute a very prominent example of frame breaking, and therefore draw attention to the fact that narratives, as well as life, are constructed through frames (Waugh 28). Here, it is important to establish that frame-breaking can occur on different levels. First of all, the traditional framework of the narrative is broken up due to the fact that the narrative does not take the predetermined course, which would bring it to a close in no more than one way. While this would already be enough to break the readers’ aesthetic illusion, the frame-break is in many cases underlined by the layout of the narratives, which display physical ruptures of different kinds, ranging from blank pages to physical cuts. The second case of frame breaking occurs when the readers are asked to step into the narrative in order to decide in which way it should proceed and thus become producers rather than just perceivers of the narrative. This is a clear case of metalepsis, a process by which the boundary between different narrative levels is crossed (Metzler 431). Not only do the readers cross the boundary that separates them from the characters of the narrative, by taking on the role of creators rather than just perceivers they also cross the boundary which separates them from the narrator or creator of the narrative. In this way, multiple endings break various frames at the same time and therefore also draw the readers’ attention to the important, yet often disregarded, role of frames in narratives.

Thirdly, Patricia Waugh draws attention to the readers’ roles as players in metafictional narratives, and the consequences this has for the reading process. Since narrative is often viewed as a game, multiple endings make the readers aware of their roles as players and draw their attention to the fact that they have to make a choice in order to be able to go on playing (Waugh 42). In the words of Linda Hutcheon, the readers “are distanced, yet involved, co-producers of the novel” (xii). It is probably safe to assume that the more readers have to be active in making a choice for one ending over another, the more likely the text will destroy the readers’ aesthetic illusion, since they will be made more aware of their roles as active agents in the meaning-making process of the narrative. David Jeffrey even goes so far as to argue that multiple conclusions to a narrative can be regarded as “one of the most obvious features of the contemporary trend towards transferring obligation for coherence and structure from the speaker to the listener” (153), or in this case rather from the narrator to the reader.
In conclusion, it can be said that multiple endings are very effective metafictional devices which draw attention to the narrative’s constructedness and its status as an artefact in a variety of ways. Yet, it would be too simplistic to assume that breaking up the illusion is the only effect that multiple endings have on the readers because multiple endings can also serve the completely opposite purpose and enhance the readers’ closeness to the text.

3.2 Multiple endings and the theory of aesthetic perception: how multiple endings can enhance the readers’ feeling of reality

According to Wolfgang Iser’s theory of aesthetic perception, we have come to a point at which it is more appropriate to abandon the question as to what the text actually means in favour of the question as to what the text does to its readers, and thus lay more emphasis on the active nature of meaning (41). Therefore, we can presume that multiple endings trigger some response in the readers, and that this response is decisive for the reading process. It is probably safe to assume that a break in the narrative or a split of the narrative into two or more different strands of narration will cause bewilderment in the readers. The next step is then to turn to the plot and to look for a possible analogy between what is happening to the readers and what is happening to one of the main characters, so that we can draw an extended analogy not only between the structure and the plot of the narrative, but an analogy which also incorporates the readers in its framework. What we are looking for on the level of the plot is a situation of insecurity of one of the protagonists, a situation in which a character is confronted with someone or something he cannot understand and therefore is at a loss as to what to do. There is little doubt about the fact that such a situation will cause bewilderment as well as fear in the protagonist, exactly the same feelings that have also been triggered in the readers by the multiple endings. The protagonist and the readers are therefore placed into a similar situation and the readers are brought a step closer to the text and given an enhanced feeling of reality. This phenomenon is especially prominent in those cases in which the readers are asked which decision the protagonist should make. In these narratives, the readers are really put into the situation of the protagonist and have to face exactly the same decision that the protagonist has to face. On the one hand, this device will, of course, destroy the readers’ aesthetic illusion, but they will also get a feeling of what the protagonist is going through and therefore be better able to identify with the main character of the narrative. And last but not least, there is also a link between the extended analogies between plot and structure of the narrative and the readers because in many cases the quest of the readers for the real and definite ending of a narrative can be equated to the narrative’s own struggle to
bring the narrative to a satisfactory conclusion. Therefore, we can say that multiple endings have two very different effects on the readers. This is perhaps best expressed in the words of Linda Hutcheon, who describes the paradox as follows. “On the one hand, [the reader] is forced to acknowledge the artifice, the “art”, of what he is reading; on the other, explicit demands are made upon him, as a co-creator, for intellectual and affective responses comparable in scope and intensity to those of his life experience” (5).

3.3 The didactic value of multiple endings

In view of the fact that multiple endings can nowadays also be found in children’s literature and that children’s literature has always been intimately connected to pedagogy (Nikolajeva 3), it is doubtless interesting to ask if multiple endings in children’s narratives can be used for the transmission of values. Furthermore, if one thinks about it closely, it becomes clear that a narrative split makes it possible to present readers with a narrative at the core of which lies a binary structure. Indeed, such a binary structure, especially if based on a simple binary opposition such as good or bad, or right or wrong, can easily be used to teach children certain patterns of behaviour. If the protagonist makes the right decision, the outcome of the narrative will be positive, and if the protagonist does something wrong, there will be negative consequences. This is a pattern that will be easily understood even by young readers because in their cases a positive behavioural pattern will also lead to a reward, whereas a negative behavioural pattern will lead to sanctions.

Nevertheless, some very interesting issues remain to be looked into more closely. First of all, it is worthwhile asking if this pattern is really suitable for postmodernist times, which are characterised by a great complexity surely also felt by children. We have learned that nowadays there are no simple yes or no answers, so it remains to be seen if a narrative based on a binary opposition will really be able to also treat more complex subject matters. Furthermore, it is important to know in which way the values will be presented to the readers. Will there be direct commands given to the readers, or will there be a much more subtle teaching of values mainly based on analogies from which the readers have to draw their own inferences? It therefore remains to be seen how far multiple endings are qualified to teach young readers values which do justice to the complexities of life in postmodernist societies.
4. Multiple endings in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde

Although Patricia Waugh regards metafiction and its devices as a tendency inherent in all narratives, she admits that fiction of this kind has become especially widespread and important from the beginning of the 1960s onwards (5). As a result, the rise of metafictional writing coincides with the rise of postmodernism, which explains why multiple endings as a form of the metafictional practice first appear in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde of the 1960s and 1970s. However, in spite of the fact that multiple endings as a metafictional device first appear in the literature of the postmodernist avant-garde, examples are by no means as numerous as in other genres, such as popular literature. Among the few important examples, John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* or Richard Brautigan’s *A Confederate General from Big Sur* have to be mentioned as the first long narratives to display this feature, and Robert Coover’s “The Babysitter”, and B.S. Johnson’s “Broad Thoughts From a Home” are excellent examples of short narratives which offer the readers multiple endings to choose from.

Due to the fact that the narratives to be discussed were written during the heyday of postmodernist production, a high degree of complexity in form as well as function of the multiple endings is to be expected. Therefore, narratives which belong to the literature of the postmodernist avant-garde will probably display a much higher number of endings to choose from than narratives which can be labelled as popular literature or children’s literature. And indeed, Johnson’s “Broad thoughts from a home” has no less than 18 endings for the readers to choose from, followed closely by Coover’s “The Babysitter” with six endings. Furthermore, the stress on reflexivity (Kershner 73) points to the fact that the narratives in question will with all probability destroy the readers’ aesthetic illusions in a variety of ways, so as to draw attention to the texts’ constructedness and to encourage awareness as well as critical discussion of the narrative as a construct.

Summing up, the focus on reflexivity, which many narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde display, points to a very complex structural make-up of multiple endings in this kind of literature. Nevertheless, it remains to be explored which kind of strategies the narratives are most likely to employ so as to achieve their goals in the most satisfactory way, and to find out if there are other, complementary devices which enhance the metafictional potential of the multiple endings in the narratives.
4.1 Richard Brautigan, *A Confederate General from Big Sur*²

*A Confederate General from Big Sur* was written in 1964. It contains a total of six different endings and is therefore the narrative with the highest number of endings which will be discussed in this context, as well as the oldest example of a postmodernist narrative displaying this feature. When it comes to a discussion of the plot, *A Confederate General from Big Sur* proves to be a rather exceptional case due to its apparent simplicity. The plot centres on the protagonist Jesse and his friend and spiritual guide Lee Mellon, who are aiming to find out if Lee Mellon’s ancestor was a Confederate General. However, instead of actively looking for evidence which might confirm or disprove their suspicions, they decide to go and live in a row of shacks near the seaside without money or modern amenities, and stay there until the end of the narrative. Nevertheless, the readers learn that Augustus Mellon is not the hero that the protagonists are hoping to find because from the chapter entitled “The Wilderness Alligator Haiku” (*Confederate General* 79) onwards, the narrative of General Augustus Mellon is narrated parallel to the narrative in the last paragraph of each chapter. In the end, the protagonists themselves are never able to find out the truth about Augustus Mellon, and in spite of the fact that every now and then there are some little anecdotes about Lee Mellon’s and Jesse’s search, no great action ever takes place.

4.1.1 Description of the endings

4.1.1.1 Discours

*A Confederate General from Big Sur* is undoubtedly an exceptional example as far as the number of its endings is concerned. All in all we get six different endings five of which are realized endings, i.e. they continue the narrative of Jesse and Lee Mellon and their quest. The sixth and last ending is not an ending as such as it does not contain any narrative, but merely informs the readers that there are more and more endings, until the narrative is having 186,000 endings per second. This accounts for a high degree of ontological instability of the narrative towards its end because not only are the readers given five different endings, but the narrative even seems to dissolve. The number 186,000 is also of great importance in this context because there are as many endings to the narrative as there are miles per second in the speed of light (Bernheim, 32), so that the narrative seems to run away from the readers at the speed of light.

As far as length is concerned, the first thing the readers will notice is the fact that all of the endings are extremely short. If we think of what has been stated earlier about the


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discrepancy in definition between what McHale and Torgovnick regard as an ending, it can be said that this narrative indeed contains multiple endings instead of the usual multiple closures, since any of the given endings could function as the last paragraph of the narrative. However, despite the fact that all the endings are extremely short and consist only of one paragraph, we can still note slight differences in length, which varies from 19 lines to a mere three lines and only two sentences. Yet, I would argue that the difference in length does not account for any great differences in importance of the respective endings, as they are all extremely short in view of the overall length of the narrative. Again, the extreme shortness, just like the high number of the endings, can be said to destabilize the narrative from an ontological point of view. This is due to the fact that because the endings are so short, there is no time to rebuild the aesthetic illusion for the readers between the different narrative ruptures. Furthermore, the readers can see the physical as well as narratorial ruptures of the narrative at the same time because the endings are given on no more than two and a half pages. As a result, the readers are constantly made aware of the constructedness of the narrative without ever having the opportunity to suspend their disbelief for a single moment during the last pages of the narrative.

All the endings are contained in the last chapter of the narrative, which is entitled “To a Pomegranate Ending, Then 186,000 Endings Per Second” (Confederate General 112). They are given one after the other and do not seem to follow any particular order. In order to guide and orient the readers, there is a whole range of visual signposts. The first hint towards the multiplicity of endings is doubtless the title of the chapter in which the endings are contained. The first ending is separated from the rest of the text by one line of blank space, which, in view of the fact that the rest of the narrative’s paragraphs are normally joined together and that only the first line of each new paragraph is indented, is a clear visual sign that some sort of rupture has taken place. Before the second ending there is again a blank line plus a small caption in capital letters, which can be found in the middle of the page, saying “A Second Ending” (Confederate General 115). The same applies to the third, fourth and fifth endings until the readers come to a paragraph entitled “186,000 Endings Per Second” (Confederate General 116). This last chapter informs the readers that “[t]hen there are more and more endings: the sixth, the 53rd, the 131st, the 9,435th endings, endings going faster and faster, more and more endings, faster and faster until this book is having 186,000 endings per second” (Confederate General 116). In view of this high number of possible endings, it also becomes clear as to why the endings are not entitled ‘the’ second, third etc. ending, but ‘a’ second, third ending. What the narrator wants to express with this type of enumeration is the
arbitrary nature of the order of the endings. A second ending is not necessarily ‘the’ second ending, but any ending which happens to occur to the author in second place. Thus, the order that the author has imposed on the endings seems rather arbitrary, and in this way, some power is taken away from the author as an ordering instance in favour of an unstable and moving universe in which randomness and instability prevail. Other important signposts are the first sentences of the endings, which all say “A seagull flew over us” (Confederate General 114ff). This not only informs the readers at which point in the narrative they are situated, but this sentence also stresses the simultaneity of the endings, it stresses the fact that they are all happening at the same time, they are mutually exclusive and therefore again put into question the ontological stability of the narrative. Therefore, it can be said that the high number of visual as well as textual signposts are not only employed to guide the readers safely towards the end of the narrative, but they also constantly draw attention to the text’s constructedness, while undermining any attempt on part of the readers to naturalise the illusion-breaking effect of the endings.

4.1.1.2 Histoire

The narrative split in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* takes place right at the end of the narrative when the narrator Jesse and his girlfriend Elaine are in their hut at Big Sur and try to engage in sexual intercourse, which due to the fact that Jesse is highly intoxicated turns out to be impossible. It is not quite clear if the moment of the narrative split really coincides with a narratorial kernel, but nevertheless, the split does take place at a stopping point because Jesse falls asleep and then wakes up again and again in different scenarios. Placing the narrative split in the framework of the Freytag-pyramid is rather complicated due to the fact that the nature of the narrative makes it difficult to define the climax of the narrative. It seems that the lives of the protagonists continue aimlessly, just as the narrative does, never coming to a proper conclusion, but rather dissolving and thus disappearing. As for the contents of the endings, it is noticeable that they are all very similar to each other. In the first ending, aptly entitled “A Pomegranate Ending” (Confederate General 112), Jesse and his girlfriend Elaine join Lee Mellon and his girlfriend Elizabeth near the sea. There they see Roy Earl, a mutual friend of the protagonists, who has come to pick up a pomegranate he forgot earlier. After Roy Earl has left, the four remaining people just keep on staring at the sea. The second ending presents a quite similar scenario. Jesse and Elaine join Lee Mellon and his girlfriend at the sea, sit down beside them and again keep looking at the sea. In the third ending, Jesse and Elaine stay inside the hut and listen to a bird flying above them, while in the fourth ending...
they again leave the hut, get dressed and catch Lee Mellon and Elizabeth while they are throwing Roy Earl’s money into the sea. In the fifth ending, Jesse and Elaine again stay inside the hut and Jesse reaches out into the sky and touches the bird. The last ending is the ending which is not actually an ending, but rather a postscript, an indicator to the readers that there is more ahead, that the narrative is actually not yet finished. It states that there are even more endings until the narrative is having 186,000 endings per second so that the narrative seems to run away from the readers instead of coming to a proper conclusion. Similarly to what has been mentioned in terms of discourse time, the endings are also very similar in terms of story time. Most of the endings can be said to comprise no more than a few minutes of story time due to the fact that very little action takes place. The endings in which Jesse and Elaine stay in the hut are probably slightly shorter in terms of story time as they do not give more than a few seconds of action. Just as before though, these slight differences are negligible if viewed in relation to the overall length of the narrative, which comprises a time frame of at least a couple of months.

Due to the lack of a central conflict it is impossible to describe the endings in terms of happy or sad because they lack either quality. None of the endings paints either a very positive or a very negative picture of the future, so that the endings can be said to be rather neutral. What is closely linked to this neutral quality is surely also the open-ended nature of the endings. Neither of the endings brings the narrative to a satisfactory conclusion on either of the levels. On the level of questions, the readers will probably want to know if the protagonists ever find out the truth about Augustus Mellon and thus raise a question which remains unanswered, while the level of expectations allows two possible outcomes for the narrative. The protagonists will either find what they have been looking for and in doing so, finish their quest, or they will at some point acknowledge the impossibility of their task and as a consequence end their search. However, in the endings of *A Confederate General from Big Sur* the characters do neither. They never find out about the real Augustus Mellon, but they never realize that they will probably never discover the truth. They remain therefore in a state of delusion, hoping that at some point in the future the mystery will be solved without actually doing anything to achieve their goal. In this way, the quest does come to an end because the readers realize that the characters will never achieve their goal, but as far as the protagonists themselves are concerned, the narrative remains open-ended because it is clear that they will never willingly finish their quest, and they will not actively try to really find Augustus Mellon either.
What is very interesting about the five realised endings is that they can also be described as a study in variation owing to the fact that they all describe very similar scenarios, i.e. there are two slightly different scenarios with three and two variations respectively. In the first scenario and its three variations, which account for the first, second and fourth ending, Jesse and Elaine leave the hut and join Lee Mellon and Elizabeth. All of these endings start with the sentences “A seagull flew over us. We got dressed and went back to Lee Mellon and Elizabeth” (Confederate General 114f). At this point, the actual variation takes place because Jesse encounters the people he has been looking for three times in different situations, searching for a pomegranate with Roy Earl, just staring at the sea or throwing Roy Earls’ money into the sea. What also makes these endings quite similar is that they are slightly longer than the other two endings and contain at least some action as well as dialogue. The fact that these endings are just variations of the same scenario is also underlined by a sentence which at first glance seems insignificant, but upon close inspection turns out to be of the greatest importance as well as metafictional in nature. In the second, just like in the first ending, the four protagonists end up sitting at the border of the sea, staring into the water. After Jesse and Elaine have sat down in the second ending and have thus just arrived at the same place that they were in at the end of the first ending, Jesse knowingly states, “That’s where you’ve seen us before” (Confederate General 115).

The second scenario we are given is the one with Jesse and Elaine staying inside the hut. This variation, which can be found in endings two and five, also starts with the sentence “A seagull flew over us” (Confederate General 115f), but lacks the second sentence that also links the three previously mentioned endings. These two endings are both very short and the seagull plays a central role in them because the protagonists either listen to the song of the bird or Jesse reaches out to touch it.

4.1.1.3 Interaction between discours and histoire

In A Confederate General from Big Sur it is hard to find a connection between the endings and a moral dilemma of one of the characters. Nevertheless, we can still draw some parallels between the discours and histoire of the narrative on the level of extended analogies between the discours and a broader theme. One central theme is doubtless the quest. The protagonists are looking for Lee Mellon’s ancestor, they are trying to discover the truth about him and his past, but in the end it seems that the truth evades the characters just as the narrative evades the narrator as well as the readers. The narrative is not given a satisfactory ending, and neither are the narrative of Augustus Mellon or are the lives of the protagonists
It seems that the protagonists have lost any sense of responsibility because they have decided to waste away their lives doing nothing and getting high in a row of shacks at the seaside. This complete lack of orientation as well as irresponsibility can again be seen as a central theme in the narrative, which is shown in an abstract sense in the lack of orientation that the narrative displays at the end. One last point which has to be taken into consideration is also Jesse’s state of intoxication in the last chapter of the narrative. Although it cannot, of course, naturalise the metafictional potential of the multiple endings, it can again be viewed as a decent portrayal of Jesse’s state of mind. It seems that the sensory impressions surrounding him overpower Jesse and culminate in a confusing blur, just as the narrative ends in a blur of different situations.

A discussion of the multiple endings as an analogy of arbitrariness also yields interesting results. First of all, the narrative split is in this case not linked to any kernel or moral dilemma, but rather takes place unmotivated as well as unexpectedly. Furthermore, the titles designating the endings as “‘A’ second ending” or “‘A’ third ending” (Confederate General 112f, emphases mine) instead of ‘the’ second ending also point to this highly arbitrary nature of the endings. Moreover, we have to consider the last, but very important paragraph of the narrative. This paragraph makes it clear that there are many more endings to the narrative. For the readers this means that they only receive a very limited selection out of a complete corpus of endings, and it seems that the question as to which ending they get in a fully realised and textual version is again more dependent on chance than on any intervention of the narrator. A further point to be kept in mind is that all of the endings, excluding the very last one, have a very similar quality as open-ended as well as neutral endings, so that they seem to be interchangeable without altering the meaning or the overall tone of the narrative, which adds further emphasis to the fact that the endings can in this case be regarded as being of an extremely arbitrary nature.

4.1.2 Functions of the endings

4.1.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

The six endings of *A Confederate General from Big Sur* are surely extremely effective when it comes to destroying the readers’ aesthetic illusion by frustrating their expectations of closure. As has been previously discussed, neither of the endings, if viewed in isolation, is able to provide satisfactory closure to the narrative on either the level of questions or the level of expectations. This feeling of open-endedness is further enhanced by the fact that there are five different outcomes to the narrative. Thus, the narrative rather dissolves and in so doing
comes to an end instead of coming to a satisfactory conclusion, and in this way frustrates the
readers’ expectations of closure. But there is also another side, which to some extent mitigates
the experience of extreme open-endedness. First of all, the readers have probably been
acquainted with the concept of open-endedness of narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde
by the time they come to read the narrative, so that they do not really expect any satisfactory
closure on the level of expectations. If the readers, then, do not expect closure, an extreme
case of open-endedness will probably not surprise them as much as it would, had they
expected a closed ending. On the level of questions, the only question of importance is
whether the characters ever discover the true nature of Augustus Mellon, but it is made
abundantly clear quite early in the narrative that the protagonists will never find out about the
assumed Confederate General because they are not really looking for the truth, but rather
believe in the fairy-tales that Lee Mellon tells them. Thus, the only question which is of
importance on the level of questions is answered long before we come to the multiple
endings. Closure is therefore not really expected here either, so it can be concluded that, in
spite of the fact that the multiple endings can be viewed as a metafictional device, frustrating
the readers’ expectations of closure, we must not forget that the readers are to some extent
prepared for such an ending, owing to the fact that the structural make-up of the narrative
suggests that there will be an open ending, in that all important questions are answered before
the physical end of the narrative.

Parody and defamiliarisation as devices which break the readers’ aesthetic illusion
also play an important role. The multiple endings of the narrative in question can doubtless be
regarded as a parody of the typically open-ended, postmodernist ending. Multiple endings are,
of course, an extreme case of open endings since they completely deny the readers
satisfactory closure on the level of expectations, and furthermore, the endings which are
offered to the readers are so open and similar that they are practically interchangeable. While
reading the multiple endings the readers are also made aware of their roles as players, but it
has to be said that this issue does not have the importance it has in other narratives. While it is
true that the readers can choose one of the endings, their choice does not really affect the
overall meaning of the narrative due to the aforementioned fact that the endings are
practically interchangeable.

Another issue worth mentioning is that the multiple endings break the frame of the
narrative. The narrative split represents a clear visual as well as narratorial fissure within the
text, but it is probably safe to assume that this fissure it not as surprising as it may seem at
first glance, due to the fact that the narrative undergoes a split much earlier in the narrative.
Starting with a chapter entitled “The Wilderness Alligator Haiku” (Confederate General 79), the chapters towards the endings of the narrative are all cut into two different strands of narrative, one telling the readers about the protagonists’ lives and the other portraying the true life and actions of Augustus Mellon. Thus, the readers are already acquainted with the device of a narrative split long before they come to the multiple endings, and the illusion-breaking effect of the endings is therefore, at least to some extent, attenuated. But there is also another frame-break, which occurs in the very last ending. This paragraph cannot be classified as an ending as such, but rather as a meta-comment on the development taking place in the narrative. As this meta-comment on the narrative is clearly on another level than the narrative itself, the reader has to step from one level to the next, i.e. a frame break must occur in order to make the readers’ understanding of this comment possible. This is then a clear case of a metafictional frame break and therefore attacks the readers’ aesthetic illusion. Of the greatest importance too in this context is the sentence “That’s where you’ve seen us before” (Confederate General 115) right at the end of the second ending. As discussed earlier, this sentence hints towards the fact that the second ending is actually nothing more than a variation of the first ending. What is more, this sentence points to the fact that the protagonist is aware of what has previously taken place. This is, of course, impossible as the endings are mutually exclusive, i.e. they cannot co-exist and neither can one of the characters know what has happened in the other endings. Jesse has therefore crossed a line which he was not supposed to cross and the result is a very typical example of metalepsis, a clear frame-break. As has already been discussed, the narrative fissure is also reflected in the structural make-up of the narrative. Since the endings are so short, they can be seen at the same time so that the readers have no time to build up their aesthetic illusions between one frame-break and the next. This, of course, draws attention to the constructedness of the text and makes sure that the readers cannot even for a moment suspend their disbelief.

4.1.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect of the endings

When it comes to finding an analogy between the readers and the protagonist and with that a possible analogy and a link between the different levels, things might not be as clear as in other narratives, but nevertheless, there are some parallels between what is happening to Jesse and what is happening to the readers. It is clear that the occurrence of six different endings will confuse the readers to some extent, and although the endings are not linked to any decision that the protagonists or the readers have to make, the readers’ confusion starts to make at least some sense if we consider the fact that Jesse is highly intoxicated at the precise
moment at which the narrative split occurs. Not only is it stated that Jesse is too high to engage in sexual intercourse with his girlfriend, but as some of the last endings show, he is even so intoxicated as to confuse visual and oral signals and states that the seagull’s voice was “passing historically through songs of gentle colour” and that “the bird’s shadow was in [his] ears” (Confederate General 115). It is clear that a state of intoxication comparable to Jesse’s can easily cause great confusion in a person, the same kind of confusion that the readers experience when they encounter the multiple endings of the narrative. Furthermore, the theme of the quest is of the greatest importance. It seems that Jesse and his friends are searching for the “real” Augustus Mellon and his narrative, just as the readers are looking for the “real” ending to the narrative. Both parties are trying to obtain something which in the end evades them; there is a clear parallel between the narrative of Augustus Mellon, which evades the protagonists, and the narrative, which evades the readers without having given them any satisfactory conclusion to the narrative. Therefore, it is justifiable to say that multiple endings can in this case also be used as a means to heighten the readers’ aesthetic illusion.

4.2 John Fowles, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*[^3]

John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* was first published in 1969. It contains a total of three different endings and is surely one of the most widely known and most heatedly discussed examples of a narrative with multiple endings. Its plot centres on the protagonist Charles, an aristocrat who lives in England at the end of the 19th century, and the difficult decision he has to make with regard to his love life. Although he is engaged to the rich but rather shallow Ernestina Freeman, he falls desperately in love with Sarah Woodruff, a “fallen” woman who is looked down upon by the local populace. Throughout the narrative, Charles tries to figure out the best and most suitable way in which to solve his problems, which finally leads him into different directions and offers the readers different solutions to Charles’ dilemma as well as different endings to the narrative.

4.2.1 Description of the endings

4.2.1.1 Discours

John Fowles’s *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* offers the readers three different endings. Interesting to note in this respect is that only two of the endings are placed at the physical end of the narrative, which is due to the fact that the narrative undergoes two splits at different points. The narrative is therefore divided into two different strands of narration in

chapter 43 the second of which is again split in chapter 60. What can be established with
certainty as far as the length of the endings is concerned is that the first ending consists of two
chapters, chapter 43 and 44, which make up for eight pages out of a total of 445 of the
narrative. As for the second and third ending, it can be said that the length of these endings is
largely a matter of interpretation, which leaves room for three different possibilities. First of
all, it is possible to place the beginning of the second ending right after the first ending has
finished, in which case the second ending comprises quite a large number of pages. A second
possibility is to let the beginning of the second ending coincide with the beginning of the last
scene, i.e. Charles’s final encounter with Sarah, so that the second ending comprises all of
chapter 60. Finally, the beginning of the second ending can be placed right after the second
narrative split, so that this ending does not account for more than the second half of chapter
60 and is of similar length to the first ending with a total of six pages. The third ending
comprises then most of chapter 61 and is about four pages long. In this case, all three endings
are of nearly equal length in terms of discourse time, meaning that there is no prevalence of
one ending over another as far as the number of pages is concerned. Still, the first ending is in
this case twice as long as the last one, but in view of the overall length of the narrative, the
difference in length of the endings as far as discourse time is concerned is negligible.

The French Lieutenant’s Woman gives the three endings one after the other and the
narrator insists that at least the order of the last two endings is completely arbitrary. This can
be inferred by a statement from the narrator, who claims to be merely the recorder of the
narrative instead of its creator, and because there are two possible outcomes to any fight
which are both equally valid and credible, he decides to give both endings and to toss a coin
to decide which ending to give first. Nevertheless, he has to admit that “[he] cannot give both
versions at once, yet whichever is the second will seem, so strong is the tyranny of the last
chapter, final, the “real” version” (FLW 390). This clearly indicates an awareness that the
order of the endings does indeed play an important role for the narrative as a whole, and the
narrator’s statement is in any case rather questionable due to there being various hints that
point to the fact that the order of the endings is all but arbitrary. First of all, it has to be noted
that in some cases the understanding of certain key passages in one ending largely depends on
having read the previous ending. A very clear example of this kind of connectedness of the
endings is the narrator’s statement right at the beginning of the first ending that “Sam had bet
himself a thousand pounds that they would stay in Exeter” (FLW 320). At the beginning of
the second ending, after Sam has been informed that his master indeed intends to stay in
Exeter, it is stated that Sam is “a thousand unpossessed pounds richer” (FLW 329). This
statement at the beginning of the second narrative strand can, of course, only be understood by the reader who has read the first ending. Let us also not forget that in the case of the first ending the readers cannot really choose not to read the ending since there is no hint as to what they are going to read before the ending starts. Thus, they blindly stumble into the first ending and only when it has come to a close are they made aware that they have just read one possible outcome to the narrative. But it seems that it is necessary for the readers to have read the first ending so as to be able to appreciate the unconventionality, suspense and interest that the second and third endings have to offer. In the case of the second ending, things are quite similar. Although the readers are informed that there will be two endings to come, they do not know the exact moment at which the narrative split will take place, so there is no possibility of not reading the second ending. But again, one cannot fully grasp the tragedy of the third and final ending if one has not read the second ending. This is due to the fact that in the third ending Charles never finds out that he has a daughter, and the reader is furthermore misled by the indication that a young woman, who might have been her mother, is playing with the child. Only if the readers have read the second ending do they know that Sarah is the young girl’s mother and that Charles is therefore her father and only then can they grasp the full tragedy of the moment in which Charles sees his own daughter without knowing that she is his child. Another interesting statement about the order of the endings has been made by Anton Kirchhofer. In his view, the same social pressures and constraints which made Dickens change the sad ending of *Great Expectations* to a happy one simply because it was assumed that readers would not like an unhappy ending, also worked on Fowles, and, in a way, obliged him to put the unhappy and open ending last so as to conform to the literary rules of his time (147). In view of all of these suggestions, it is questionable whether the author’s statement that the order of the endings is chosen randomly can be regarded as true.

As far as signposts which help the readers as an orientation are concerned, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* proves to be quite an exceptional example. This is due to the fact that the narrative relies on a very limited number of techniques, namely narratorial intrusions, as well as the repetition of certain key passages, to guide the readers through the narrative. Right at the beginning of chapter 45, the narrator informs the readers that “having brought this fiction to a thoroughly traditional ending, [he] had better explain that although all [he has] described in the last two chapters happened, it did not happen in the way [the readers] may have been led to believe” (FLW 327). After a lengthy discussion as to why this is not the real ending of the narrative, as to the craft of writing and the novelist’s role in telling Charles’s narrative, the narrator finally re-situates the readers in the narrative at the point when Sam, Charles’s wallet,
goes to ask Charles if they are going to spend the night in Exeter by telling the reader to “kick Sam out of his hypothetical future and back into his Exeter present” (FLW 328). In order to further help orient the readers, Sam employs the same words “Are we stayin’ the night” (FLW 320&328) as in the first ending. Thus, the only devices used in the case of the first narrative split are an authorial intrusion, albeit quite an extensive one, as well as the repetition of one sentence, which works as a signpost to tell the readers at which point the narrative resumes.

When the readers encounter the second narrative split, they are confronted with quite a similar situation, which nevertheless differs from the first ending in one crucial point. In this case, the narratorial intrusion is placed before the two endings, so that the readers are well aware of what the narrative has in store for them before the two endings begin. Thus, there is again a lengthy discussion about the nature of fiction, the role of the narrator as not only recorder but also creator of the narrative, and about the narrator’s decision to give both possible endings to the fight between Charles and Sarah so as to be as impartial as possible. At the beginning of the last chapter the scenario is quite similar. The narrator bluntly interrupts the narrative to tell the readers about a person who is sitting opposite the house in which the action takes place and all of a sudden turns back the time on his watch and with that also the time in the narrative. In this way, the readers are told that the time in the narrative has been turned back fifteen minutes, but because this is not enough to situate the readers at the exact point in time at which the narrative resumes, a whole paragraph from the second ending is repeated verbatim. Charles therefore exclaims in rage to Sarah, “No. It is as I say. You have not only planted the dagger in my breast, you have delighted in twisting it”, and later concludes that “[her] punishment shall outlast eternity” (FLW 433&442). Therefore, we can conclude that again the only devices which are used are authorial intrusions into the narrative as well as the repetition of selected phrases. Nevertheless, these two devices should be enough to guide the readers due to the extensive nature of the narratorial comment which explains what is happening in the narrative in a very detailed manner, and the choice of the repeated phrases, which due to their harsh and emotional nature will doubtless be recognisable for the readers.

4.2.1.2 Histoire

As has previously been discussed, part of the complexity of the three endings in The French Lieutenant’s Woman lies in the fact that there are two narrative splits at two different points in the narrative. Both of these narrative splits are situated at a kernel and it can be argued that both are tied to a moral dilemma. At the first bifurcation, Charles has to decide if
he will stay in Exeter to meet his lover Sarah and end his engagement with Ernestina, or if he will go to Lyme Regis, be true to his fiancée and forget about his lover. Thus, the first ending is triggered by Charles’s decision to go to Lyme Regis and to go through with his marriage to Ernestina. In this ending, the readers get the whole of Charles’s and Ernestina’s future life summed up in no more than two chapters. Charles and Ernestina spend their lives together and so do their servants Sam and Mary. Dr Grogan, Charles’s good friend, dies of old age many years after the incidents, Mrs Poulteney, formerly Sarah’s employer, goes to hell for being such a horrid person and Sarah Woodruff is never heard of again. What is very peculiar about this ending is the fact that it comprises an extremely large time span in terms of story time. In no more than five pages the narrator tells the readers everything there is to know about Charles’s and Ernestina’s future until their deaths, and also manages to sum up the lives of all the other important characters. But this heavy weight that the first ending carries in terms of story time does not necessarily give it any prominence over the other endings, which comprise a much shorter time span. Due to the fact that the narrator dedicates only a few lines to the lives of all the protagonists, the first ending gets a very superficial quality, which surely diminishes much of its importance within the narrative.

In the second strand of narrative, Charles decides to stay in Exeter. He goes to see Sarah, the two of them have sex and then Charles leaves for Lyme to break off his engagement with Ernestina. Later he returns to Exeter to tell Sarah that he has left Ernestina but he finds out that she is no longer where he left her, but has set out on a journey without telling him where she intends to go. Charles, desperate and determined to spend the rest of his life with Sarah, sets out to find her, but it takes him months until he can locate her in London in the house of Gabriel Rossetti, where the last and decisive encounter between the two protagonists and the second narrative split take place. In the first version we are given, Charles finds out that he has a daughter and he and Sarah decide to spend their lives together. In the third ending, though, Charles never finds out that he has a daughter, breaks things off with Sarah and leaves, never to see her again. What is interesting to note is that in this case the narrative split is again situated at a kernel, but the decision which triggers the two different strands of narrative is not Charles’s but Sarah’s. Sarah is the one who decides if she will tell Charles about his daughter and accept his proposal to live together as husband and wife, or if she will pretend not to have any feelings for him and drive him away. As a result, there has been a shift of focus as well as power from Charles to Sarah, which makes it very clear that at the end of the narrative, Sarah has won the battle, i.e. she is the one who has the power to decide about the futures of them both, whereas Charles is in this case the powerless
character, totally at the mercy of the woman he is in love with. In terms of story time, the second, as well as the third ending comprise a comparable period of time, which we can assume to be some few minutes long. This claim can be substantiated by a hint in the text that states that the character who turns back the time before the second narrative split turns back time a quarter of an hour.

If we want to place the two narrative splits in the framework of the Freytag pyramid, it can be said that Charles’s and Sarah’s kiss in the woods is surely the inciting moment, as in this scene it becomes abundantly clear that Charles has deep feelings for Sarah and is experiencing an inner struggle the outcome of which is still uncertain at this point in time. But there is also another important incident which could be regarded as the inciting moment. This is the scene in which Charles has to decide if he will stay in Exeter or go on to Lyme Regis, a decision which is of the greatest importance as it is linked to the first narrative split. The ending in which Charles decides to go to Lyme proves to be anti-climactic since nothing remotely interesting or surprising happens and the narrator does not dedicate more than a few pages of only minor importance to bringing the narrative to a close. In the second case, though, Charles decides to meet Sarah, which leads directly to the climax of the narrative, a passage containing their meeting and their sexual intercourse. There is little doubt about the fact that this is the climax of the narrative as it serves as the catalyst for all the things that are to follow. Therefore, it can be said that the first of the three endings can be described as nothing but a big anti-climax, due to the fact that the readers are given merely a falling action. The second strand of narrative, which later again splits into two different strands, contains the big climax of the narrative, the moment when Charles and Sarah first have sex, Charles’s quest for Sarah and their final encounters, which bring the narrative to a close.

A lot of ink has been spilled on a classification of the endings in terms of open vs. closed and happy vs. sad ending. The first ending, which the narrator himself calls a “thoroughly traditional ending” (FLW 327), has to end with the marriage of Charles and Ernestina if it wants to adhere to the narratorial, as well as the social, conventions of the Victorian age, and it has to inform its readers how the characters’ lives will go on without leaving any major strings untied. Indeed, the narrator is trying hard to provide his readers with this very kind. Charles returns home to his fiancée and they spend the rest of their lives together. Sam and Mary get married, Dr. Grogan dies of old age and Mrs. Poulteney goes to hell. But in spite of the fact that this ending seems to be a “thoroughly traditional ending” (FLW 327) at first glance, it leaves us with a bitter aftertaste. While it is true that the narrator seeks to achieve satisfactory closure for all the important characters, the way in which he
achieves it should make us think. He writes about Sam and Mary that “[t]hey married, and bred, and died, in the monotonous fashion of their kind” (FLW 325) because he cannot be bothered to go into more detail about the life of people as unimportant as servants. The life of Dr. Grogan is equally brushed over so that at some point one cannot avoid the feeling that what we are getting is more of a fake Victorian ending because there is no real closure for the lives of the characters, but merely hints as to the courses their lives will take. And finally, there is no closure for the most important character in the narrative, Sarah Woodruff. What is also of the greatest importance is the narrator’s ironic comment that “Charles and Ernestina did not live happily ever after; but they lived together, though Charles finally survived her by a decade (and earnestly mourned her throughout it)” (FLW 325). All these factors are sure signs that the first ending is not really to be regarded as a traditionally closed Victorian ending, but rather the mocking of one. This makes it extremely difficult to describe the first ending in terms of open or closed and happy or sad ending because while on the surface it seems to be a happy and closed ending, it also has strong features of an open and not at all so happy ending upon closer inspection.

As for the second ending, we can say that it comes much closer to our conception of a typically closed ending. Charles breaks his engagement with Ernestina, and although he is punished for his deed in that it takes him a long time to find Sarah, in the end they are reunited and Charles finds out that he has not only found a wife, but also his daughter. When the narrative comes to a close we are granted closure on the level of expectations because we expect a love story to end with the lovers admitting their feelings to one another and deciding to spend the rest of their lives together. On the level of questions, the readers find out that Charles has indeed been able to find Sarah and the two of them decide to spend their lives together and there is even a reasonable explanation for Sarah’s seemingly inexplicable behaviour. But still, some strings are left untied. The readers therefore never discover if Ernestina ever recovers from her shock, but it has been argued earlier that a narrative seldom manages not to leave any loose ends at all. Summing up, it can therefore be said that there is no doubt that the second ending is a closed and happy ending because as far as the protagonists are concerned, all the readers’ expectations are met and all the important questions answered.

The third ending, in contrast, can be called a typically postmodernist open ending. The readers are not granted closure on the level of expectations because the two protagonists never make peace but instead end their relationship permanently after a fight, nor are we granted closure on the level of questions because we never discover why Sarah has acted the way she
did. Furthermore, the ending is a sad ending since the central conflict is solved in a very bleak and negative way, and furthermore, it is left open as to whether Charles will ever find out the truth about his daughter or not. Therefore, it is justified to say that the third ending fulfils all the criteria of a postmodernist open ending.

Analysed in terms of variation, *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* also displays interesting features. The first narrative split leads the narrative into two totally different directions, but still there are traces of variation right at the beginning of the narrative split. This variation is rendered quite cleverly because the circumstances in which Charles makes the decision are described in a similar, yet not identical way. In both situations Charles is asked by Sam if he intends to stay in Exeter as soon as he gets out of the coach which has taken him there, or if he wants to go on to Lyme Regis immediately. The most important sentence in this context is surely the catchphrase “Are we stayin’ the night” (FLW 320&328), which in the first version is given as “Are we stayin’ the night, Mr Charles” (FLW 320), and in the second version as “Are we stayin’ the night, sir” (FLW 328). It is therefore justified to say that the first narrative split also presents us with a variation of some kind in spite of the fact that the narrative later on develops into totally different directions. The second and third ending can clearly be described as the variation of the same scenario. In both cases Charles meets Sarah, but while the first encounter ends happily, the second ending has a negative outcome. Nevertheless, there are many similar occurrences, such as the appearance of the Charles’s daughter, but these situations and happenings are interpreted differently according to the overall tone of the narrative. Furthermore, it is of the greatest importance that both endings take place in the same setting with the same characters, i.e. in both endings Charles and Sarah have an important conversation in the house of Gabriel Rosetti. Therefore, one can regard the second and third ending as the happy and sad versions of the same situation.

### 4.2.1.3 Interaction between *discours* and *histoire*

The question as to whether or not the multiple endings in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* can be seen as the physical expression of something happening on the level of the plot, or if they are rather to be regarded as an analogy of postmodernist arbitrariness, is quite an intricate one. This is due to the fact that both bifurcations are open to different interpretations. In the case of the first narrative split, it is obvious that the split is tied to a decision that Charles has to take. Thus, there is a clear link between what is happening on the level of the content and what is happening on the level of the *discours*. In the case of the second narrative split, things are not so straightforward because this narrative split can be
interpreted in two different ways. Firstly, we can regard it as an analogy of the decision Sarah has to take with regard to Charles, in which case there is an analogy between what is happening on the level of the plot and what is happening structurally. This analogy furthermore entails a clear shift of importance from one character to another. While towards the beginning of the narrative Charles is still the more powerful person, Sarah takes over control as soon as she disappears and compromises Charles because he ends his engagement to Ernestina. But Sarah’s taking control of Charles as well as of the narrative can also be interpreted in another way. As Sarah is regarded as “the other” from Charles’s as well as the readers’ perspective, we are much less likely to identify with her and therefore regard her decision as being completely arbitrary, which then makes the last two endings seem like an analogy of arbitrariness.

As for broader themes, the quest again plays an important role due to the fact that the first narrative split can be tied to Charles’ quest for the right way to lead his life, i.e. if he should go against social constraints or stay with the woman he is engaged to, whereas later in the narrative the quest for Sarah plays an important role. Another connection which has been established is the connection between the endings and the theme of existential freedom. Simon Loveday has argued that Charles is in many ways an existentialist and that this theme is reflected in the structural makeup of the narrative, which also grants the readers a great deal of freedom. He even goes one step further and claims that the endings stand for the three directions into which Charles can evolve after having gained awareness of his freedom. He can either reject freedom, which would result in the marriage with Ernestina and lead to the first of the three possible endings. The second ending, in which Charles and Sarah are reunited can, according to Loveday, then be seen as Charles’s reaction to his nagging anxiety of freedom. He chooses to go against conformity and to neglect the social conventions which would like to see him at the side of shallow Ernestina, but instead chooses a woman who can to some extent be regarded as the personification of freedom. The third ending, then, can be seen as the triumph of Charles’s existentialist self because Charles is finally able to gain complete freedom from all social constraints (58ff). Consequently, we can say that the narrative splits are open to a whole variety of different interpretations which point in opposite directions, and the final decision as to whether the endings can be regarded as an analogy of the plot or as an expression of postmodernist metafictional arbitrariness depends largely on the angle from which the problem is viewed.
4.2.2 Functions of the endings

4.2.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

Despite the fact that *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* offers the readers a total of three endings, only two of them are what McHale describes as “true” or “metafictional” multiple endings (101). This can be explained by the fact that the readers get a reasonable explanation with which the first of the three endings is put *sous rature*, and at the same time its metafictional potential is naturalized. After the first ending, the readers are informed that all that has occurred in the last chapter has not really happened, but that it is just part of Charles’s imagination. But it has to be asked whether this really means that all of the illusion-breaking potential of the first ending is in this way completely naturalised. By taking a closer look at the way the ending is put *sous rature* it soon becomes clear that this is not so. Thus, the narrator states at the beginning of chapter 45,

And now, having brought this fiction to a thoroughly traditional ending, I had better explain that although all I have described in the last two chapters happened, it did not happen quite in the way you may have been led to believe. [...] The last few pages you have read are not what happened, but what [Charles] spent the hours between London and Exeter imagining might happen. (FLW 327)

This passage already reveals that the first ending is well able to break up the readers’ aesthetic illusion due to the way in which the narrator puts the ending *sous rature*. Fowles gives his readers a logical explanation for what has happened and thus avoids questioning the ontological status of the ending, but he does it in such a way that readers are clearly made aware of the fact that the narrative they are reading is nothing but fiction. The first sentence quoted above overtly states that what they are dealing with is a fiction, and moreover, that the narrator is the person in charge, the person who has brought the narrative to a close. As if this were not quite enough, he defines the ending as a “thoroughly traditional ending” and even mentions the physical dimension of the ending with the words “the last two chapters” and “the last few pages” (FLW 327).

And there are still more signs that point towards the fact that even though the first ending is put under erasure quite reasonably, it has a high metafictional potential due to the fact that many of the devices pertaining to true metafictional endings are also present in this first ending, therefore also breaking up the readers’ aesthetic illusion. First of all, we need to consider Patricia Waugh’s hypothesis that multiple endings lay bare literary conventions through parody or defamiliarisation (68f). As has previously been discussed, the first ending cannot really be described as a Victorian ending, but should rather be regarded as the parody of one. Right towards the end of the first ending, the narrator makes it abundantly clear that
he is just inventing closures for the lives of the characters which the readers will regard as satisfactory, and in this way, obviously mocks the style of Victorian novels. This, of course, clearly draws attention to the text’s constructedness and identifies the narrator as the creator and not merely the recorder of the narrative. But the narrator does not only mock the style of the Victorian novel, he also mocks and wittily uses or abuses his powers as an omniscient third person narrator when he states that “[he] is happy to say, [he] can summon up enough interest to look into the future – that is, into [Mrs Poulteney’s] after-life” (FLW 325) and then gives some ridiculous account of how the aforesaid Mrs Poulteney is denied entrance into heaven and in this way punished for her bad deeds. With this statement the narrator makes it very clear that the decision about the future of the characters is his alone and that the readers do not have any power in the narrative, or at least should not have any power if we were to adhere to the rules of novelistic writing of the Victorian period. What this technique also entails is a frustration of the readers’ expectations of closure on various levels. First of all, it is important to note the particular brevity of the ending if set in relation to the overall length of the narrative that has been told up to this point. Dedicating no more than a few lines, in extreme cases only one sentence, to the lives of the characters will surely come as a disappointment to the readers. But there is also another way in which the readers’ expectations of closure are frustrated. Charles’s various encounters with Sarah have built up certain expectations in the readers and there is no doubt about the fact that an ending in which the heroine just disappears without a trace and her lover does not even bother to go looking for her will not be regarded as a satisfactory ending by the readers.

The importance of frame-breaking might not be obvious at first sight, but upon closer inspection one becomes aware of the fact that it must not be disregarded either. When the narrator presents Charles’s dream as if it were reality, there is a clear frame-break. The boundary between the reality of the narrative and the sub-world of Charles’s mind and dreams has been crossed, and in spite of the fact that the readers only become aware of this fact later, this is nevertheless an important frame-break in which two different spheres are merged. Furthermore, there is another frame-break when the narrator decides to address the readers directly and so makes them aware of their roles as active producers in the narrative. The narrator says to the readers, “So let us kick Sam out of his hypothetical future and back into his Exeter present” (FLW 328). The important word in this sentence is the pronoun ‘us’ because it indicates that the narrator is ready to acknowledge not only the presence of the readers, but also their importance in the creation of the narrative. In doing this, the readers are made aware of the fact that they play an important role in the creation of the narrative. In this
way, they cross the boundary from being passive perceivers of the narrative to becoming active producers and once again an important frame has been broken up. Summing up, it is therefore doubtless justified to say that the first ending in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, in spite of not fitting into the classification of a “true” or “metafictional” ending according to McHale (101), also breaks up the readers’ aesthetic illusion with the same devices that can be encountered in so-called or “true” or “metafictional” endings.

In the case of the second and the third ending, the matter is a slightly more straightforward at first sight because both endings can clearly be described as “true” or metafictional endings, but on closer inspection it becomes clear that the two final endings of the narrative differ from the first ending only superficially. The only real difference is that they have the same ontological status, since none of them is in any way naturalized or put under erasure. But apart from that, the strategies employed in these endings resemble the strategies of the first ending very closely.

First of all, the readers’ expectations are frustrated by the two endings on various levels. The third ending will be especially frustrating for the readers because it goes counter to their needs on the level of expectations. As *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is a love story, any ending which does not conclude the narrative with a happy ending for the lovers will be highly unsatisfactory for the readers. This is all the more the case because there is a lot of dramatic irony in the last ending. Charles’s daughter appears in the third ending just as in the second, but in the third ending Charles never becomes aware of the fact that he has a daughter, which makes the narrative all the more dramatic. Therefore, frustration of the readers’ expectations of closure also plays an important role in the last two endings. This issue is, of course, also closely linked to the laying bare of literary conventions through parody or defamiliarisation. First of all, the narrator gives the readers what they want to have, i.e. he gives them an ending which does not only end with the lovers being reunited, but with Charles’s realization that he has in fact a whole family. This is without doubt what could be called a suitable ending to the narrative because it fulfils the readers’ expectations of closure. But then the narrator goes on to relate the very opposite narrative and makes the readers aware of the fact that he has been playing around with their expectations and wishes, only to be able to disappoint them in the end. By putting the open and sad ending last, the narrator therefore lays bare the fact that certain conventions have led readers to expect a particular type of ending.

Another extremely important point to be addressed is frame-breaking. In spite of the fact that the frame-break in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is not visible on the physical
level of the narrative, since what separates one ending from another is nothing but the usual boundary between two chapters, this point is of the greatest importance because the frame-break occurs on different levels. One of the most important issues in this context is surely the appearance of the narrator in the narrative. Before the narrative split takes place, the narrator steps into the train with Charles in an instance of metalepsis and then decides to converse with his audience about the problems he has to face as the narrator of the narrative. He would like to leave Charles on his journey to London forever, but what hinders him are the norms of the Victorian novel, which say that the narrative has to have a closed ending. This clearly lays bare the fact that neither author nor narrator are God-like creatures, but that they also have to fight against certain constraints imposed by society and convention. The narrator is at a loss because he does not know what to do with his character. If he follows his own wish, the public will be outraged; if he follows the opinion of the public, he cannot be true to himself. What is also of the greatest importance is that he explains that normally writers only pretend to be the recorders of fights between different parties and that in truth they fix the fight, letting the character of their preference win. Furthermore, he thinks that the only way to be impartial is to offer his readers different endings with two different winners. The narrator pretends to give up his position as a creator and merely becomes the recorder of the incidents. This, of course, also makes the readers aware of their roles as players in the narrative. If the narrator thinks them to be important enough to discuss narratorial issues with them, and, furthermore, leaves them to decide between one ending or another, it is clear that their role is of great importance in the narrative. They are no longer the passive perceivers of the narrative, but also have to cross a boundary and become active producers of the narrative.

4.2.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect of the endings

As far as the illusion-heightening effect of the endings is concerned, one will surely not fail to notice that the multiple endings in *A French Lieutenant’s Woman* are very likely to cause bewilderment as well as disorientation among the readers because we must not forget that at the time the narrative was published, this device was revolutionary and new and was previously unseen by most readers. And if we now turn to our protagonist, we see that Charles is equally puzzled and bewildered because he too is confronted with something/someone he has never seen before. Therefore, the readers as well as the protagonist are in a situation in which they have to deal with something new, something unexpected, and are therefore very likely to experience similar feelings. But apart from this very simple connection between the protagonist and the readers, a whole variety of other approaches have been offered. Gwen
Raaberg, for example, approaches the subject from the point of view of feminist studies. Her point of departure is the Western tradition of seeing a connection between textuality and sexuality. According to this notion, the author and readers are positioned as the male subject, whereas the text acquires the notion of the female object which is mastered by the reader as the latter is trying to tease out the meaning of the text. But this process is severely undermined by narratives like *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which defy interpretation on all levels (532). Thus, Charles is unable to make meaning of Sarah’s behaviour, just as the readers are unable to make meaning of the multiple endings which conclude the narrative. Peter Conradi has described this process as follows:

The narrative therefore seduces and betrays us exactly as Sarah seduces and betrays Charles – after which we like him, face an inclusive ending and suffer our freedom together. Our narrative and his thus progressively converge, and when, at the end, he is thrust on to his own resources we are also painfully thrown back on to ours, disappointed perhaps, but freer and better men. (Conradi, quoted in Raaberg, 524)

What this “converging of stories”, as Conradi puts it, should bring home to us is that again the protagonist and the readers are put in a similar position. This is further underlined by the fact that the readers perceive a big part of the narrative from the point of view of the male protagonist Charles (Raaberg 530), and are therefore even more closely bound to him and his mode of perception.

Linda Hutcheon starts at a different point, but again is able to draw parallels between the plot and the structure of the narrative. In the centre of her attention is the concept of freedom. Throughout the narrative, the protagonist Sarah is granted a great deal of freedom, much more than would be deemed appropriate for a woman during that time. At the same time, the readers are given a great deal of freedom, the freedom to choose their own ending. Linda Hutcheon concludes that “Fowles’s freedom-granting core plot involving Sarah and Charles is an allegory of the freedom granted the reader, the thematized reader, by another character, the narrator” (28).

4.3 Concluding thoughts about multiple endings in the postmodernist avant-garde

Any discussion of multiple endings in narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde will not fail to draw attention to the fact that multiple endings in the early stages of postmodernism are characterised by a high degree of complexity. This complexity either comes from an high number of endings or from a structure in which the narrative undergoes various narrative splits at different points in the narrative, in which case the readers are offered different branches of narration which they can follow and which again are split into different branches,
and so offer what we could call a minimal multi-path narrative as well as a glimpse of what will come many years later with the rise of computers and hyperfiction. Common to both of these strategies is that they ask for more than one narrative split, so that not only the narrative is broken up at various points, but with it also the readers’ aesthetic illusion. This illusion-breaking effect is further enhanced by the comparative shortness of the endings, which leaves the readers little or even no time to rebuild their aesthetic illusion between the different narrative ruptures. It probably goes without saying that the complexity of the narratives in question also asks for many devices which act as orientation for the readers. Indeed, *A Confederate General from Big Sur* abounds with techniques which successfully guide the readers through the last pages of the narrative, ranging from captions numbering the different endings, to the same set of phases at the beginnings of all the endings. *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, though, only relies on two techniques, i.e. narratorial intrusions and the repetitions of key phrases, but uses them so extensively and consistently as to make orientation for the readers possible. One strategy which is used extensively in both narratives are repeated sentences, forcing the question as to whether this signpost is only used as a means of orientation, or whether it could also serve another purpose. And indeed, it soon becomes clear that the repeated sentences can also be used to stress the simultaneity as well as the exchangeability of the endings. Therefore, we can say that the visual and textual signposts are not only used as a means to guide the readers, but also enhance the ontological instability of the endings and therefore their metafictional potential.

But complexity is not only a characteristic feature on the *discours* level, but also on that of the *histoire*. This becomes abundantly clear as soon as one tries to analyse the endings in terms of open, closed, or even happy or sad. Although it is clear that narratives are normally not easily categorised in these terms, and that it will be hard to find any narrative with a completely happy, sad, closed or open ending, the endings in the narratives discussed seem to evade any satisfactory description. It is true that the first ending of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* seems to be a happy and closed ending, but what are we to make of the fact that Charles’s and Ernestina’s marriage in the end does not seem to be all that happy and that we never find out what happens to Sarah? Do these things not point towards the opposite direction? And what about the endings that *A Confederate General from Big Sur* has to offer us? While it might be true that they are all extremely open-ended, there is no way of telling whether they are happy or sad. Are people who sit at the seaside and throw money into the water happy, sad or are they just mad? As far as variation and permutation are concerned, *A Confederate General from Big Sur* seems to be a paradigmatic example of a narrative in
which the different endings are nothing more than variation of the same scenario. *The French Lieutenant's Woman*, in contrast, seems to lead the narrative into two totally different directions in its last two endings, but nevertheless, the situation which is described is a very similar one although the outcome is completely different.

There are various links between the narrative splits and what is happening on the level of the *histoire*, but it has to be noted that the endings do not exclusively have to be linked to some moral dilemma, as Aarseth suggests (323f), but are also linked to much broader concepts which occur as central themes in the narratives. Thus, on the one hand, the endings of *The French Lieutenant's Woman* can clearly be seen as an analogy of the important decisions which have to be taken by Charles and Sarah, but, on the other hand, they can also be tied to the concept of existential freedom or to Charles’s quest for Sarah. A similar thing applies to *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. First of all, the endings can be seen as an allegory of arbitrariness, but, on closer inspection, you can also draw a parallel between the reader’s quest for the real narrative and the protagonists’ search for Lee Mellon’s ancestor. Still, both cases can also be seen as an analogy of arbitrariness because just as nobody can predict why the endings succeed each other in the order they do in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, nobody understands why in one ending Sarah claims to be in love with Charles, while in the other ending she tells him not to have any feelings for him at all and thus ends their relationship for good in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*.

When it comes to a discussion of the metafictional potential of the multiple endings, it is noticeable that a whole variety of factors come into play, but that in the end there seems to be a prevalence of some selected strategies. One very important strategy is doubtless the frustration of the readers’ expectations of closure, which is intensified by the fact that either all endings, such as is the case in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, or the ending which comes last, such as in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, can be described as open endings. Therefore, the readers are denied closure in two ways at the same time. The laying bare of literary conventions plays an important role, in so far as Brautigan chooses to adhere to the novelistic modes of his time by giving the readers an extreme case of open-endedness and thus making them aware of their expectations, as well as the constraints laid upon him as an author, while Fowles decides to first give the readers the closed ending they are striving for and which is expected because he purports to be writing a Victorian novel, only to again break it up by putting an open ending last. Frame-breaking plays a great role in both narratives because the narratives are not only repeatedly broken up, but moreover they are broken up on various levels at the same time. These levels include the physical level of the
narrative, in which case there will be visible ruptures in the narrative, the level of the narrative proper, i.e. the ruptures which take place within the narrative itself, and thirdly, there are even ruptures which break up the boundaries between the levels of the narrators and the audience, resulting in situations in which the narrator discusses important information about the art of story-telling with the audience. Another strategy is making readers aware of their roles as players. Although it is true that the readers are free to choose the ending they prefer, they nevertheless have to follow the structure which the narrator has chosen for the endings when they first read the narrative because in some cases they are not even made aware of the fact that they are merely reading one possible ending to the narrative. Therefore, we can conclude that the multiple endings in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde break up the readers’ aesthetic illusion on various levels and are therefore extremely effective as metafictional devices.

Nevertheless, it would be short-sighted to claim that the multiple endings can only be used as a metafictional device as there are hints that point towards the opposite direction. Thus, Charles’s quest for Sarah can be related to the readers’ quest for the real novel, and in view of the fact that the readers, as well as Charles, seem to be put in a similar situation, i.e. they are confronted with a person/situation that is equally confusing and fascinating, they will probably be better able to identify with what is happening to Charles. Similarly, *A Confederate General from Big Sur* seems to dissolve and run away from the readers just as the truth about Lee Mellon’s ancestor and indeed his whole life seem to run away from Jesse. What the readers as well as the protagonists are confronted with at the end is nothing more than a confusing blur of different impressions which simply defy interpretation.

Summing up, we can say that multiple endings and narrative splits in narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde undoubtedly thrive on their complexity. Therefore, it takes a lot of narratorial skill to guide the readers through these narratives, as well as it takes a very experienced reader to fully appreciate the potential of these texts. The endings of both of the narratives in question display a high metafictional potential, which is based on a whole variety of factors, but first and foremost, it relies on frame-breaking to achieve its effect. Nevertheless, the endings can also be employed to draw the readers closer to the text since in both cases a quest which is proceeding on the level of the narrative proper can be linked to the readers’ quest for the definite ending to the narrative.
5. Multiple endings in popular literature

Although the division of literature into high literature vs. popular literature has always aroused heated debate, it is necessary to give a definition of the term ‘popular’ in order to be able to delimit the corpus of texts which will be discussed in this context. Bob Ashley, after having discarded sales numbers as an indication of what belongs to popular literature and what is high literature, gives two interesting definitions. On the one hand, he associates popular literature with an undiscriminating mass readership, and, on the other hand, he states that popular literature is the kind of literature that remains after all the “good” and valuable literature has been acknowledged. But in spite of its lack of recognition in literary criticism, one must not underestimate the importance of popular literature since it makes up most of the reading matter of people nowadays (1ff).

In view of this, it should not come as a surprise that the first famous narrative with two endings was Pauline Reage’s *Histoire d’O* (*The story of O*), a narrative published in 1954, which was primarily recognised for its extensive portrayal of sexual practices rather than its literary artifice. Furthermore, it has to be noted that, contrary to expectation, there are numerous books in popular literature which have multiple endings due to the fact that, beginning in the 1980s and going up into the new millennium, whole series such as the *Turning Points* series or the *Follow your Heart* romances were published. These series exclusively consist of narratives which contain a narrative split and contain between seven and twelve different narratives. So we can conclude that in spite of their lack of influence in the literary scene, popular books were not only the first to play with the concept of multiple endings, but they are also far more numerous than could be expected.

5.1 M.L. Kennedy: *Kerry’s Dance*

According to its front cover, *Kerry’s Dance* is “[a] romance with two endings”. It was published in 1984 and is part of a whole series of similar romances called *Turning Points*, which were published in the early 1980s and all follow a similar pattern. They feature a protagonist who is faced with a problem which has two possible solutions, i.e. there are two possible paths that the protagonist can take. What is interesting in this regard is that both paths are realized in the narrative and that it is entirely up to the readers to decide which way the protagonist and the narrative should go.

*Kerry’s Dance* depicts the life of 15-year-old Kerry Graham whose greatest wish is to become a professional dancer. The narrative focuses above all on Kerry’s feelings, the

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hardships she has to face because her life follows a dreary routine, which is divided between schoolwork and her dance lessons. But suddenly, this routine is broken up by two important events. On the one hand, Kerry falls in love for the first time with a handsome young man called Ian, and on the other hand, she is awarded a scholarship, which would enable her to spend six months at one of the most famous ballet schools in Paris. Kerry has to then decide if she will go to Paris to pursue her career and run the risk of losing her boyfriend, or if she will stay in New York with her family and possibly miss the chance to become a renowned dancer.

5.1.1 Description of the endings

5.1.1.1 Discours

*Kerry’s Dance* offers the readers two endings to choose from both of which comprise one chapter, or 22 and 17 pages respectively, out of a total of 12 chapters and 156 pages. The second ending is slightly shorter than the first ending, but in view of the total number of pages this is doubtless a negligible difference which does not account for any prevalence of one ending over the other. The two endings are given one after the other and the readers are first made aware of the fact that the narrative has two different endings by a sentence on the front cover which states that *Kerry’s Dance* is “[a] romance with two endings…which one would you choose?” Therefore, the readers are told what they are going to find inside the book right from the beginning. The second time the readers are confronted with the narrative split is by a page which obviously does not continue the narrative, but asks the readers to decide what the protagonist of the narrative should do and then go to the respective ending and continue reading. Not only is this intrusion placed right in the middle of an otherwise blank page, but it is also written in italics so as to physically distinguish it from the rest of the text. What we get after this intrusion is one blank page, which is a further indication of the rupture which has just taken place because it is the first time a blank page is inserted into the book. After this blank page the readers are given the first ending, which is accordingly entitled “Ending 1” (*Kerry’s Dance* 115), although it would be chapter eleven if the author were to continue the numbering of the chapters as used before the narrative split. After ending one has come to an end, made clear to the readers by closing with the words “The End” (*Kerry’s Dance* 137) in bold print, there is another intrusion into the narrative, which takes the form of the sentence “Ending 2 begins on the next page” (*Kerry’s Dance* 137). This is again followed by a blank page and then ending two, which is entitled in the same way as ending one and runs on until page 156, where it finally ends and is closed by the words “The End” (*Kerry’s Dance* 156).
Interesting to note is that in spite of the fact that the readers seem to be given the choice between the different endings, there are a couple of hints which point to the fact that to some extent, the readers are expected to read the endings in a certain order. First of all, the endings are given one after the other and entitled “Ending 1” (Kerry’s Dance 115) and “Ending 2” (Kerry’s Dance 139), which in itself already suggests a certain order of reading. A minor, albeit important detail is also the sentence at the end of ending one, “Ending 2 begins on the next page” (Kerry’s Dance 137), which clearly encourages the readers to explore what is happening to the protagonist in the other ending. This becomes all the more significant if we consider the fact that a similar sentence is missing after the end of the second ending. The readers are not referred back to the first ending, suggesting that the author does not expect readers to begin with the second ending, but assumes that they will begin with the first ending. Furthermore, it is important to note that none of the endings are put under erasure, which is stressed by the captions naming the endings “Ending 1” (Kerry’s Dance, 115) and “Ending 2” (Kerry’s Dance 139). Not only do these captions bring the endings into a pre-determined order, they also stress their simultaneity as well as their exchangeability.

5.1.1.2 Histoire

In Kerry’s Dance the narrative split takes place when the protagonist Kerry has dinner with her boyfriend Ian and is about to tell him about the decision she has made with regard to the scholarship she has been offered. While in one ending she decides to stay in New York with her parents and her new love, in the other ending, she chooses to leave New York and to go to Paris for six months in order to pursue her career as a dancer there. The moment of the narrative split is clearly a decisive one in the narrative and can surely be seen as a narratorial kernel because depending on Kerry’s decision, the narrative will move into different directions, and this moment therefore opens up different alternatives for the narrative. Furthermore, it can be said that Kerry’s Dance is a paradigmatic example of a narrative in which the narrative split is closely linked to a moral dilemma and the choice of one ending over another is determined by the choice that the readers and the protagonist make. If we want to place the structure of Kerry’s Dance in the Freytag-triangle, we will see that the narrative very neatly fits into this framework, and that the narrative split is indeed situated close to the climax. Thus, we can say that both Kerry’s meeting Ian and their evolving tender romance, the narrative about her wanting to be a dancer and the description of her daily routines can be seen as the introduction. This is followed by the scene in which Kerry is offered the scholarship, serving as the inciting moment for what is to come. From this moment on the
narrative takes on a somewhat faster pace as the rising action begins. What we can see as the climax is Kerry’s appearance in Swan Lake and her dinner with Ian in the course of which she informs him about the decision she has made. And it is right at this moment that the narrative split takes place. Just when Kerry is about to tell Ian what she is going to do, the narrative undergoes a rupture and the readers are asked to decide what Kerry should do. As soon as this decision has been taken, the narrative resumes and through the falling action, which sends Kerry either to a new school or to Paris, leads the readers towards the end. Therefore, it can be concluded that the two endings do not contain more than the falling action and the conclusion of the narrative.

Just as in terms of discourse time, the two endings are also equal in terms of story time and comprise both a few months of time. But the endings share even more similarities. As far as the contents of the two endings are concerned, it can be noted that despite the fact that the narrative should actually develop into two completely different directions, the two endings bear strong resemblances to each other. Basically, Kerry has to choose if dancing or her new boyfriend shall be given preference in her life, but contrary to expectation, this is not a question of foregoing one thing for the other, but it is merely a decision of placing emphasis on one thing without having to renounce the other thing completely. When Kerry decides to stay in New York and to transfer to a new school so as to have more time for herself as well as for her friends and family, she clearly places emphasis on her private life. But this does not mean that she has to give up dancing totally. In contrast, having more time free from school also means that she has more time to focus on her dancing and more time for her boyfriend Ian. Thus, she might have missed a great opportunity by not going to Paris, but she is still able to pursue her goals and stay with her boyfriend. A similar thing happens in the second ending. Kerry decides to leave New York and to move to Paris, but this does not necessarily mean that her relationship with Ian comes to an end. While it is certainly true that it is a difficult situation for both of them, at the end of the second ending it is very clear that Kerry and Ian are still deeply in love with each other and that they have no intention of finishing their relationship. At the same time, she is able to focus on her career as a dancer and to pursue her goal with more vigour than ever before. Therefore, we can say that despite the fact that the two endings should actually develop into two totally different directions, they are not so dissimilar as might be initially expected.

An analysis of the two endings in terms of happy vs. sad or open vs. closed ending again makes it clear that the endings are very similar. Neither ending can be described as purely happy or purely sad, but it is rather justified to say that in both endings Kerry reaches
satisfaction to some extent and does lead a happy life, but at the same time there remain some nagging doubts about whether she really has made the right decision, and a certain sadness in view of the great-trade offs she has to face, no matter which way she decides to go. As far as the question about the open- or closedness of the endings is concerned, it becomes especially important to clearly distinguish the level of expectations and the level of questions. As far as the level of expectations is concerned, neither of the endings disappoints the readers. Kerry's Dance is a romance, so we expect Kerry to get together with Ian, as happens in both endings, but the narrative is also about the career of a dancer, and Kerry also continues to be a dancer in both endings. On the level of questions, though, matters are a bit more intricate. If the endings are analysed independently of each other, we must conclude that neither of the endings achieves complete closure on the level of questions because the most important question as to whether Kerry and/or the readers have made the right decision is not satisfactorily answered in either of the endings. But if we take the narrative as a whole and consider both of its endings, the narrative is able to achieve closure on all levels because we realise that both decisions have certain advantages and certain disadvantages for Kerry. We can conclude, then, that the narrative in a way needs both endings to be able to give its readers a sense of complete closure. The need to read both endings in order to achieve complete closure on all levels is also reflected in the structure of the narrative and explains why readers are encouraged to read the second ending as soon as they have finished the first ending.

An analysis of the two endings in terms of variation and permutation also has interesting results to yield. As has been previously discussed, the two endings pretend to move into totally different directions, but on closer inspection it soon becomes clear that they are not all too dissimilar. Apart from the fact that the two endings display quite similar scenarios, there are also some objects and conversations which can be found in both endings. The first important feature which we can find in both of the endings is, of course, the scene in which the narrative split takes place. This scene is continued in both endings in slightly different variations, as is also the case with the scene which follows it. Kerry comes home to her parents and although Ian is present in the first ending whereas he only drops Kerry off in the second ending, there are strong resemblances between those two scenes. Kerry informs her parents about the decision she has made and in both endings the decision is accepted in a positive way. Furthermore, she is offered dessert, although in one version she has chocolate cake and in the other she has cookies. Another interesting feature is also a gold medallion which Kerry receives from Ian and which is of the greatest importance for her in both endings. In the first ending, when Kerry decides to stay in New York, she receives the gold
medallion while having coffee in a museum with Ian, and in the second ending the medallion reappears in Paris, and when Kerry is asked about the medallion by one of her friends, it turns out that Ian gave the medallion to her at her farewell party. One last point that has to be kept in mind since it is a device which has already been explored in greater detail in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* as well as in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* is the repetition of phrases. Interestingly, we also get a sentence repeated in *Kerry’s Dance*, but unlike in the narratives discussed earlier this phrase does not come at the beginning of the two endings, but right at the end of the last paragraph, and furthermore, it has to be noted that the sentence is not repeated verbatim but in a slight variation which is still close enough to the original to allow recognition. Kerry originally states, “Yet again, Ian was introducing me to wonderful new things” (*Kerry’s Dance* 117), whereas in the second ending she claims, “Yet again, Ian was introducing me to something new and wonderful” (*Kerry’s Dance* 141). As this sentence comes right at the end of the first paragraph after the narrative split rather than at its beginning, we can discard the idea that the sentence should serve as a signpost to orient the readers. Therefore, it is much more likely that it serves as a metafictional device, which reminds the readers of the existence of the second ending, but it is also clear that this only works if the readers have already read the first ending. Bearing all these factors in mind, it is thus justified to say that the two endings of *Kerry’s Dance* can be seen as a variation of the same scenario because not only are they very much related as far as the content is concerned, but the two endings also present us with similar key scenes and objects.

5.1.1.3 Interaction between *discours* and *histoire*

The analogy between *histoire* and *discours* in *Kerry’s Dance* is quite straightforward. It is clear that primarily the multiple endings can be viewed as an analogy of the different paths that Kerry can take. The readers and Kerry have to decide what is going to happen in the narrative, i.e. in Kerry’s life, and therefore, there is a clear connection between what is happening in Kerry’s life and what is happening on the structural level of the narrative. Again, this analogy can also be conferred onto a somewhat larger scale and linked to the theme of a quest, i.e. a young girl’s quest for a way in which she can combine her dream of becoming a world-famous dancer with the deep feelings she has for her first love.

What is interesting to note, though, is the fact that there is also a scene in which Kerry and Ian talk about flipping a coin in order to be able to make a decision. And although this concept is to some extent reminiscent of what we have seen in *The French Lieutenant’s*
Where the narrator flips a coin in order to determine the order of the two last endings, the analogy with the coin takes a totally different turn in this context. Ian tells Kerry to

[flip a coin, and you tell yourself that if it comes up heads, you’ll choose A, and tail, you’ll choose B. Okay. You flip the coin, and it comes up A. Now all you have to do is ask yourself how you feel. If you’re happy, then you really wanted it to be A all the time. But if you’re disappointed, then you really wanted it to be B. It’s a snap because it forces you to confront your choices. (Kerry’s Dance 29)

And when Kerry finally follows Ian’s advice some time later and flips a coin in order to come to a decision, it becomes clear that in this case the coin is not used to take a decision, but merely as an aid to help the protagonist confront her feelings and find out which path she really wants to follow.

Nevertheless, the multiple endings in the narrative can also be seen as an analogy of arbitrariness. This is due to the fact that no matter what Kerry chooses to do, the outcome of the narrative is nearly the same. As has already been argued, both endings to the narrative are happy endings, and Kerry is able to pursue both of her dreams, which clearly points to the fact that Kerry might not have so much agency after all and that there might be a lot of good luck involved.

5.1.2 Functions of the endings

5.1.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

When it comes to breaking the readers’ aesthetic illusion by frustrating their expectations of closure, Kerry’s Dance is a really extraordinary example. On the one hand, we can argue that some readers will doubtless be frustrated by the structure of the narrative because a romance with two endings will surely be a novelty for many of them, but, on the other hand, one can hold against that that the two endings are already announced on the cover, and so the readers must be aware of what they are letting themselves into from the moment they first take the book into their hands. Furthermore, we have seen that only by reading both of the two possible endings are the readers granted full closure on the level of questions, whereas serious gaps and questions are left open if the readers only read one of them. Therefore, we might argue that Kerry’s Dance in a way needs both endings to be able to grant the readers satisfactory closure on all levels. Furthermore, it is necessary to investigate how far the laying bare of literary conventions plays a role in this regard. While it might be argued that the two endings are undoubtedly a kind of defamiliarisation to the pattern that the readers are normally acquainted with, it is to be asked how far the two endings can also be viewed as a parody. To some extent we might argue that in spite of the fact that, if regarded separately,
neither of the endings contain any elements which might make them seem like a parody, but if we consider them together, parody all of a sudden does play a role. This is due to the fact that in both endings Kerry is able to fulfil both of her dreams, i.e. she is able to stay together with Ian and pursue her dancing career at the same time. The narrator clearly points towards the fact that romances have to follow certain patterns and that no matter what the protagonist or the readers decide, the narrative will follow a pre-determined path which leads it to a happy or at least satisfactory ending for both the characters and the readers. In this way, the two endings of Kerry’s Dance can very well be seen as a parody of the tradition which leads romances to pre-determined happy endings.

Frame-breaking also plays an important role in Kerry’s Dance due to the fact that the frame-break occurs on more than one level at the same time. First and foremost, the narrative frame is broken up on the discours level. As we have seen before, the structural make-up of the book is such that only when the narrative split occurs do we get blank pages, while in the rest of the text there is no space left between the different chapters. Furthermore, there is a narratorial intrusion into the narrative at the moment when the split take place, i.e. the narrator decides to address the readers directly, which is a further frame-break, and they are asked to step into the narrative and choose which path Kerry should follow. Thus, the narrator asks the readers,

What do you think Kerry should do?
If you think that she should go to the Professional Children’s Institute and stay closer to Ian, turn the page to Ending 1.
If you think she should accept the scholarship to study in Paris, even if it means leaving Ian, turn to Ending 2 on page 139. (Kerry’s Dance 113, italics in original)

What is quite astonishing in this regard is not the fact that there is an authorial intrusion into the narrative because this is a device which can also be witnessed in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, but rather the sheer bluntness of the intrusion. This is not a subtle treatise on the nature of fiction, but the readers are given instructions as to how to continue in the reading process. The readers are addressed directly three times, and it is made abundantly clear that they will determine Kerry’s fate. Furthermore, the narrator refers to the book as a physical entity, as the medium through which the narrative is brought to the readers, by telling them to turn to a certain page in order to find one ending or the other. Thus, the authorial intrusion does not only serve as a means to guide the readers in the reading process, but it is also an extremely efficient metafictional device. As the readers have to decide which path the narrative is going to take, they are made extremely aware of their role as players in the narrative because the narrative can only proceed once they have made a decision for one
ending or the other. Nevertheless, the decision which the readers have to take although it surely influences the way in which the narrative proceeds, can be said to be of only limited importance for the overall message of the narrative, which again shifts the importance from the readers towards the narrator and all the rules she has to adhere to. What is interesting, though, is that the readers only become aware of the fact that their influence on the narrative is limited after having read both endings and finding out that they do not differ from each other as much as could be expected at first glance. No matter what the readers decide, the narrative is still a romance and therefore the frame of the narrative as a typical romance is never really broken. While it might be true that the narrative in question does not adhere to the typical pattern of a romance in that it has two endings, we nevertheless cannot fail to notice that both endings do satisfy our expectations of what a romance should be by giving us a closed and happy ending.

5.1.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect of the endings

The multiple endings in Kerry's Dance can clearly be used to heighten the readers’ aesthetic illusion due to the fact that they are asked to step into Kerry’s shoes and to decide which path she should take. Therefore, the readers also have to consider the consequences of either possibility and for this reason endure the same process of worrying and thinking as Kerry does. But apart from this very narrow link, many of the narrative’s young readers will be able to identify with Kerry and her situation on a much larger scale because it is commonly known that teenage years are filled with doubts, uncertainties and difficult decisions, just as Kerry’s life is filled with lots of new experiences and the ensuing uncertainties. Moreover, it can be said that there is a clear analogy between what the narrative does to the readers and what life does to Kerry. Just as life brings Kerry into trouble when it offers her two possible paths to follow both of which seem to be equally interesting as well as difficult, the narrative also gives the readers two ways to follow. It is clear that both situations are new because Kerry is not used to making decisions with such far-reaching consequences, and the readers are probably unused to determining the courses of the narratives they are reading. What is interesting to note in this regard is the absolute imperative of taking a decision. The readers are forced to make a decision by the structural make-up of the narrative, otherwise there is no way that the narrative is going to proceed. Similarly, Kerry has to make a decision, otherwise she might lose her career as well as her boyfriend. In conclusion, it can be said that the narrative manages to put both Kerry and the readers in the same position, and thus draws a

\[^{5}\] In accordance with Lanser’s Law, narrators will be referred to as ‘she’ if the author of the narrative is female.
clear analogy between what is going on in Kerry’s life and what the readers are experiencing while reading the narrative.

5.1.2.3 The didactic value of the endings

In view of the fact that Kerry’s Dance is geared to a teenage readership, it is also worth looking into possible didactic values transmitted by the two endings. What is certainly interesting to note in this respect is that Kerry’s Dance does not display a binary structure in its endings in terms of happy or sad ending, as would probably be necessary to teach readers that good deeds are rewarded and bad deeds are punished, but instead, both endings end happily, albeit with some sad undertones in view of the trade-offs Kerry has to face. Thus, these endings are used to teach readers that in some cases there are no right or wrong decisions, and that any decision can have positive as well as negative consequences at the same time. Keeping in mind the age of the readers, it also becomes clear why Kerry’s Dance does not present the readers with a simple good-bad binary structure because at the age of fifteen, life has mostly become too intricate to allow for simple right or wrong decisions. Therefore, it can be concluded that Kerry’s Dance does indeed manage to transmit postmodernist values and to describe the intricacies of life to a young readership with the help of multiple endings.

5.2 Susie Gilmore: Love Stuck

Susie Gilmore’s Love Stuck was first published in 2001. It is a romantic comedy which tells the narrative of young Jessica, who moves from Inverness to London, not only to get a new and exciting job, but moreover to find out if her relationship with the handsome but shallow James is worth fighting for, or if she should rather try her luck with Sam, her lovely but not all that exciting new flatmate. When James finally breaks up their relationship, but later wants her back, and Sam, at the same time, tells Jessica that he is in love with her, Jessica has to decide which man she prefers and which course her life as well as the narrative should take. What is very peculiar about the narrative is the fact that alternately it is made up of letters that Jessica writes to her friend Alex, who seems to be travelling through China, and is thus told in the first person, while every other chapter is a third person narrative.

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6 Gilmore, Susie: Love Stuck. London: Flame, 2001. Will hereafter be referred as ‘Love Stuck’. As opposite pages in the book always bear the same page number after the narrative split, it has been decided to add the words ‘left’ or ‘right’ to the page numbers so as to make an unequivocal distinction possible.
5.2.1 Description of the endings

5.2.1.1 Discours

Although it could be assumed that multiple endings in popular literature most probably lack the complexity that characterises multiple endings in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde, the first intricacies in *Love Stuck* arise as soon as one wants to determine the exact number of endings. Although the front cover tells the readers that they are dealing with “[a] novel with one girl, two blokes and three endings”, the narrative has three men, two endings and one epilogue. The two endings are unique in the way that they are exactly of equal length with each ending comprising exactly 87 pages out of a total of 338 pages, or a bit less than a fourth of the narrative. This equality in length is stressed by the peculiar structural make-up of the narrative. After the narrative split on page 158, the two endings run parallel to each other, i.e. while one of the endings is pursued on the left-hand pages, the other ending runs parallel to it on the right-hand pages. Furthermore, the pages on the right as well as the left side always bear the same page number. Thus, the choice between one ending over another is in this case exclusively left to the readers and not determined structurally by the writer if we are to assume that the reading order common in western cultures in which the left-hand page is read before the right-hand page does not play too great a role. Therefore, *Love Stuck* probably gives its two endings as much structural equality as is possible in a printed narrative.

As far as visual signposts are concerned, there is a whole range of devices which serve to acquaint the readers with the narrative split at different stages in the reading process. The first time the readers come to know about the fact that there will be a narrative split is when a statement on the front cover of the book plainly informs them that they are about to read “[a] novel with one girl, two blokes and three endings”. A similar indication can be found on the back cover of the book. Instead of a description of the content or a short excerpt, the readers are first asked if they are love stuck and then told to “[m]eet Jess, the epitome of the failed Cosmo woman” (emphasis in original). Afterwards, the readers are presented with four different questions with two possible answers to them, such as, “She is going out with James, a sexy fund manager. Does he make her feel: a) Special, loved and happy b) Paranoid, insecure and miserable”. All of the answers have boxes to tick in the form of little hearts next to them, but while in the case of the first three questions, one of the boxes is ticked and the readers are thus informed that James makes Jess feel “[p]aranoid, insecure and miserable”, that Sam, her new flatmate whom she has a slight crush on is “[i]mpossible to read and having a weird thing with Petra”, and that, although Jess and James are going through a serious crisis,
she decides to “[c]ling on [because] a crap boyfriend is better than no boyfriend”, the last question remains un-answered. Thus, the readers are asked if Jess will pick Sam or James, and are then told that the choice is entirely theirs. Therefore, the back cover also makes it abundantly clear to the readers that they are about to encounter a narrative with a narrative split and that they will play a decisive role in determining its course.

The second range of devices comes right at the point at which the narrative split takes place. The narrative starts with a letter from Jessica to her friend Alex and runs on in the letter – 3rd person narrative – letter-pattern until page 157, which bears the caption “Urgent Fax” in big, bold letters. This page already constitutes a kind of rupture because it contains the first chapter to bear a caption, clearly distinguishing it from the preceding chapters. In this chapter Jessica asks Alex to decide for her which man she should choose, and to tick the necessary box, which is then to be found as soon as one turns the page. On the left-hand side you get the word Sam in big and bold letters, followed by a heart which has been ticked like a box, and underneath you find the sentences “Should Jess choose Sam? Read the left-hand pages….” (Love Stuck 158). On the opposite side you get exactly the same scenario for James. What is interesting to note is the fact that the layout of the pages, i.e. the names of the two men Jessica needs to decide between with the little hearts close to them, is reminiscent of what the readers have already seen on the back cover of the book. Therefore, this is not really a new device, but rather a device that the readers have already been acquainted with at an earlier stage in the reading process.

The third range of devices can be said to be part of the two endings. It runs from the moment the narrative split takes place to the epilogue of the narrative, and serves to remind the readers to only read one of the pages. Thus, the left-hand pages bear the name Sam in bold and big grey letters in the top left-hand corner of the page, as well as on the left-hand side of the page, and the same applies for James, whose name can be found in the top right-hand corner and on the right side of the right-hand pages. In order to guide the readers and to re-situate them at the right point in time in case they choose to read both endings, the letter telling Alex that Jess has got together with Sam, as well as the letter telling him about Jess’ new-found love with James, start with the same heading. In both letters she says,

Ooh, happy, happy me
Happy, happy us
Happy, happy world (with the exclusion – obviously – of things like starvation, civil war, natural disasters, etc) (Love Stuck 159, italics in original)

This is then followed by a paragraph telling Alex that Jess is happily in love with the man of her dreams. This paragraph is much the same in both endings and only shows slight variations
such as the statement that “Sam and [Jess] have got together” (Love Stuck 159 left), which is changed to “James and [Jess] are back together” (Love Stuck 159 right) so as to make it consistent with what has so far been told about the relationships between Jess and her men. But this feature does not only serve to orient the readers, it is furthermore used to hint towards the equality, the exchangeability of the two endings, which is also stressed with various other devices, such as changed structural make-up of the narrative. Although the letter – third person narrative – letter pattern is retained, there are major changes, such as the introduction of captions to the chapters. Furthermore, the chapters which are on opposite pages do not only carry the same captions, they are also completely equal in length, i.e. they comprise the same number of pages so that the narrative can run parallel all the time. Moreover, the respective chapters are also narrated in the same type of narrative situation, i.e. both chapters with the caption “What Goes Up…” (Love Stuck 159) are letters from Jess to Alex, and both chapters entitled “Must Come Down” (Love Stuck 164) are third person narratives, until this pattern in broken up in the chapter “Who’s Been Sleeping in Jo’s Bed?” (Love Stuck 209), where in the right-hand side ending two consecutive chapters are told in the form of letters. Only in the last chapter called “Love Unstuck?” (Love Stuck 239) is the pattern the same again because this time the left-hand side ending has two consecutive chapters as letters. Why this pattern should be broken up at some point and why it is re-established later on must remain a matter of speculation, especially because the similarities on the level of the content still stress the similarities between the endings. When the readers finally come to the end of one of the endings, two important structural features come into play. First of all, the last paragraph is the same in both last chapters, which becomes all the more visible because the two chapters are completely equal in length and therefore on the same height of opposite pages. Just like in the case of the first paragraph, there are some minor alterations because in the Sam ending Jess tells Alex that it took her “a wonderful wedding without Sam” (Love Stuck 244 left) to find out that James is the right guy for her, whereas in the James-ending she says that it took her “a disastrous holiday with James” (Love Stuck 244 right) to realize that she was actually in love with Sam. This feature is of the greatest importance for two main reasons. Firstly, it gives coherence to the two endings and again stresses their equality, but secondly, it also acts as a sign to show the readers that they have come to an ending, moreover, if they decide to read both endings, they will very probably recognize the passage and therefore gain a feeling of again having come to the ending without having to turn the page. The second important structural feature is a note at the bottom of the page, referring the readers back to the other ending by suggesting that the other ending contains the “right” decision for Jess.
Nevertheless, as soon as the readers come to the second ending, they are again referred back to the first ending, so that the narrative actually offers a structure of infinite regress which the readers have to consciously break up so as to be able to come to the epilogue, the part of the narrative which finally gives complete closure to the narrative.

5.2.1.2 Histoire

If *Love Stuck* were a narrative with only one ending, it would be reasonably easy to place the different parts of it in the framework of the Freytag-triangle. Everything that happens before the narrative split can be regarded as belonging to the introduction, in which the readers are introduced to Jess’ character, learn about her leaving her parents in Inverness to move to London because she has been offered a job at a company called Green Finger Productions. Furthermore, we learn about her rather crumbling relationship with James, who obviously does not treat her the way she wants to be treated, and we learn about Jess’ emotional dependence on James, which makes her unable to leave behind a relationship which is already well past its heyday. In this very difficult situation, which runs on for a total of 148 pages, James finally decides to break up with Jess, but later wants her back, thus provoking the inciting moment which forces Jess to act because now she has to make a decision between her old boyfriend James and her new flatmate Sam, who has also expressed interest in her. At this very moment the narratives split, which is linked to Jess’ decision of one man over another, occurs, taking the narrative into two different directions. But no matter which ending the readers choose, the first ending which is read will then contain the rising action, which takes Jess from a situation in which she is blissfully happy with the man she has chosen, to the dreadful realisation that she has made the wrong decision, which can be said to be the climax of the narrative. But this very neat pyramid is then broken up because the reader is referred back to the second ending in which the whole narrative is taken up again, and the climax which we encounter at the end of the first ending is thus converted into a second inciting moment which sparks the rising action and the following climax in the second ending. It can therefore be said that there is no real closure in either ending if they are both read until the readers reach the epilogue, which finally gives at least some closure to the narrative. In this epilogue, Jess picks up her friend Alex from the airport, and it seems that for the first time she is really comfortable with a man and starts imagining a future with Alex. Thus, Jess’ trials have finally come to a happy conclusion because she seems to have found a man who accepts her although he knows about all her weaknesses.
If we want to describe the two endings in terms of happy vs. sad endings, it soon becomes clear that although the narrative split induces the readers to expect that the narrative will take totally different paths depending on the decision that Jess/the readers make, both endings can be said to be totally equal in the share of happiness they provide for Jess and the readers. When Jess believes that James is the right man for her and thus chooses him, she is outrageously happy at first, but soon afterwards the relationship takes a turn for the worse and James leaves her again, while Jess spends the rest of the narrative strand wondering what would have happened if she had chosen Sam over James when she had the opportunity to do so. A very similar situation arises when Jess decides that Sam is the right man for her. Although the relationship proves to be much more stable, Jess begins to entertain second thoughts after a while because she realizes that she is not really in love with Sam, but that she still has feelings for James. Thus, Jess again ends up in a situation in which she has the feeling that she has chosen the wrong man, but ends happily when Jess decides to dump the wrong man in favour of what she believes to be Mr. Right. Therefore, both endings lead to a situation in which Jess is happy with the man she has chosen, to a state of affairs in which she regrets her decision because she is not all that happy any more with her choice, to a moment in which she is again happy because she has found the strength to get rid of the man who makes her miserable, and to make a new start with the man she believes to love. But although the situation is more or less equal in the two endings, there is still a difference to the two endings, which is induced by the order of reading. When the readers come to the first ending and are referred back to the second ending, there is still some hope left that the second time Jess will have made the right decision, but when the readers come to the second ending and are then referred back to the first ending, all this hope is crushed because they already know that the relationship with the other man will not be successful either. But then one could again argue that even when the readers come to the first ending, they will know that Jess’ quest for the right man is not going to be successful because due to the structure of the narrative, the readers can see that even if they were reading the other ending, they would be referred back to the other ending as well, which could lead them to the conclusion that the other ending will be very similar in content to the ending they are reading. Summing up, it is therefore rather difficult to determine if either of the endings can be classified as a happy or sad ending. Rather it is to be said that the quality of the ending changes according to the place in which it is read. However, we are not denied a happy ending because finally Jess is able to find the man of her dreams when she sees Alex again after a year of separation, and realizes that he
might be the right man for her. Nevertheless, this development is only hinted at because the narrative is brought to a close before this question is answered conclusively.

By trying to discuss the two endings in terms of open vs. closed ending, a very peculiar phenomenon is brought to the surface. While in Kerry’s Dance closure can only be achieved with the help of two endings, showing the readers that either way Kerry’s life will be a successful one and that no matter what she chooses to do, the relationship with her boyfriend will be a happy and stable one, we are confronted with just the opposite situation in Love Stuck. When we come to the end of the first ending we are granted closure on both levels because on the level of questions it seems that Jessica has found the right guy for her, and the level of expectations offers us a happy ending in which the woman has found the love of her life. But what comes after the first ending breaks up this sense of closure completely. By referring the reader back to the second ending, it is made obvious after only a few chapters that Jessica’s decision has again not been the right one because the second man turns out to be just as fastidious as the first one, and when we come to the second ending, it has become abundantly clear that although Jess again claims to have found the right man, there will not be a happy ending because the first man is just as bad as the second. In a way, the second ending dares to narrate what D. A. Miller calls the nonnarratable (273), i.e. the things that come after the happy reunion of the loving couple which normally closes a narrative, and thus deprives the readers of closure on all possible levels. Not only do the multiple endings fail to answer the question which man is the right one for Jess, as both turn out to be unsuitable, but we are also deprived of the happy end we have been longing for, and instead we are sent into a journey of infinite regress which will yield no satisfactory results, no matter how often we go back to the narrative split and re-read the endings. Thus, Love Stuck offers an extremely complex situation in which any ending, if read in isolation from its counterpart, can yield satisfactory closure, yet if both endings are read, the opposite is the case and we arrive at a situation which does not give satisfactory closure on any level. But how do we know if the readers will be more likely to read only one ending or both endings? On the one hand, there is the structure of the book to be considered, which gives the endings at the same time but on opposite pages, so that when the readers come to the end of the first narrative they will not find another ending waiting for them, so they are not submitted to the “tyranny of the last chapter” (Fowles 390). Nevertheless, there are signs which point in the opposite direction. Firstly, the readers are referred back to the other ending once they have completed the first ending, and secondly, there is a statement in the epilogue which points to the fact that the author expects readers to have read both endings. Jess says to Alex that “[t]wo wrongs make a
right” (Love Stuck 251) and thus refers to the fact that neither of her relationships worked out the way she wanted it to, which the readers can only have found out by reading both suggested endings. Therefore, we can conclude that the two endings of Love Stuck can be described as open endings because taken together the endings neither give a satisfactory answer to the question as to which man is the right one for Jess, nor do they yield closure on the level of expectations because in the end Jess ends up alone although we are dealing with a romantic comedy, which is supposed to end with the lovers being united.

Although the two endings in Love Stuck might not give the readers satisfactory closure, there is still an epilogue which finally grants the readers closure, although to a very limited extent. Jess has finally realized that neither James nor Sam is the right man for her, but instead seems to be falling for her friend Alex. In this way, the narrative is brought to a close at a point when Jessica seems to finally have found a man to be happy with, but it is to be assumed that some nagging doubts will remain among the readers because if Jess was wrong about James and Sam, how can she be so sure that Alex will be the right guy for her? Summing up, it can therefore be said that neither of the two endings if read in combination with each other, nor the epilogue are able to yield satisfactory closure for the readers.

As far as the description of the two endings in terms of variation and permutation of the same scenario is concerned, a thorough analysis of the matter also has interesting results to yield. The first indicators towards the fact that the two endings are no more than variations of the same situations are the captions of the chapters as well as the equality in chapter length. After having read the first ending and starting with the second ending, the readers might at first get the impression that the narrative does not necessarily start anew at an earlier point in time, but is actually continued in the second ending. But this first impression is already destroyed in the second chapter after the narrative split because in both endings Jess loses her job at Green Finger Productions, which is a sure sign that the narrative does indeed start again at an earlier point in time. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that in both endings the same incidents are recounted, but interestingly, different bits of information regarding the incidents are given in the different endings. Thus, in the “Kiss and Tell”-chapter of the James-ending (Love Stuck 195ff right) it is stated that Jess finds out that James has been having an affair with someone called Zadia because he tells her so himself, whereas in the Sam-ending, Jess finds out about the same facts by her flatmate Sophie and her boyfriend Richard in the chapter with the same title. Another peculiar instance of this phenomenon is the New Year’s Eve party Jess goes to. In the chapter entitled “Who’s been sleeping in Jo’s bed?” (Love Stuck
of the James-ending, she is confronted with a photo she does not have any recollection of posing for, and the scene is presented like this:

[Sophie] was pointing at something that looked a bit like a large radish and claiming, convincingly, that it was Jess. It was the third photo from the New Year’s Eve party that Jess had no recollection of having posed for. “Well, why am I wearing that revolting pink thing, then?” she protested, peering at a vast piece of cerise material forming the body of the radish. Sophie looked hurt. “Don’t you remember? You were upset and sat on the toilet in your dress, only the seat was up and you got a wet circle on your … behind,” she whispered. (Love Stuck 209 left)

So Jess actually seems to have no real recollection of the party she has been to due to the large amount of alcohol she consumed there in the Sam-ending. In the James-ending, though, Jess is able to tell Alex everything herself in a letter in which she relates in detail how she was embarrassed most of the time during the party and how she ended up with her behind in the toilet, wearing Sophie’s jumper. On the basis of all these instances it is doubtless justified to say that the two endings in *Love Stuck* are an excellent example of variation and permutation of the same incidents or scenarios also pointing to the fact that the endings are not only equal in terms of discourse time, but that they are also equal in terms of story time and both comprise a time span of a couple of months.

### 5.2.1.3 Interaction between *discours* and *histoire*

Finding an analogy between the structure and the content of *Love Stuck* is not difficult. First and foremost, the two endings stand for Jess’ quest for the man of her dreams and represent the decision she has to make of one man over the other. This impression is intensified by the structure as well as the content of the narrative because neither structure nor content give preference to any of the men. Content-wise it is made abundantly clear that Jess can have either of the men because both want to have a relationship with her, and structurally, the two endings are equal because they are given at the same time. Therefore, the two endings can be viewed as an analogy of the decision Jess has to take as well as for the quest for the man of her dreams, which would exclude the possibility of viewing the multiple endings as an analogy of arbitrariness.

But just like in the case of *Kerry’s Dance*, we still need to consider the fact that no matter which decision Jess takes, the ending will be the same, i.e. she will find out that her decision has not been the right one and that she will have to try her luck with the man she initially discarded. Furthermore, there are many things happening which are entirely beyond Jess’ control and which happen in both of the endings, such as Jess’s losing her job or her going to a dreadful New Year’s Eve party. These incidents would then point in the completely
opposite direction, i.e. they point to the fact that the multiple endings can very well be an analogy of postmodernist arbitrariness because it seems that although both Jess and the readers are given agency in deciding how the narrative will proceed, this agency does not mean that they entirely control the situation, but rather that there are still many things going on which are far beyond the sphere of agency of both parties.

5.2.2 Functions of the endings

5.2.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

Frustrating the readers’ expectations of closure so as to destroy their aesthetic illusion certainly plays an important role due to the fact that this feature is much more prominent in *Love Stuck* than in all the other narratives which have been discussed so far. This is because if one ending is read alone, it is very well able to satisfy the readers’ expectations of closure since it gives an answer to the question as to which man is the right one for Jessica, and it follows the pattern we expect to find in a romantic comedy, i.e. that the heroine is re-united with the man of her dreams after some adventures. But if we read both endings, we will notice that the situation changes dramatically. All of a sudden, we no longer know who the right man for Jessica is because they both turn out to be inadequate, and the heroine chooses a man whom we know from the beginning is not the right one for her. Therefore, if the readers decide to read both endings, they are denied closure on all possible levels. Furthermore, by the time we have reached the epilogue, which suggests a new man for Jessica, we are probably so marked by what has happened before that we cannot imagine that this time it is going to work out. Twice before Jess believed to have found the man of her dreams, and twice she was completely wrong, so there is no reason to assume that the third time she will be right. Thus, it might even be justified to argue that the extreme open-endedness of the two endings will probably affect the readers so much as to even partially destroy the effect of the epilogue, which grants the readers closure to at least some extent. Therefore, we can conclude that the two endings of *Love Stuck* are exceptionally effectual in frustrating the readers’ expectations of closure and thus qualify as an excellent means of breaking up their aesthetic illusion.

As for the breaking of aesthetic illusion by laying bare literary conventions, it can be said that the two endings can surely be regarded as a parody of the typical pattern of romantic comedies, which end with a reunion of the lovers after a long and also funny period of mistakes, uncertainties and misunderstandings. Through the similar pattern of the two endings, *Love Stuck* makes it abundantly clear that the fate of the heroine of a romantic
comedy is predetermined, and that there is very little room for surprises, as the structure and the path are fixed. As for defamiliarization, it has to be said that the structure of the narrative is undoubtedly of the greatest importance here. The metafictional potential of the narrative is enhanced by the fact that the readers can never really suspend their disbelief and forget about the narrative split as it is possible with narratives like *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* or *Kerry’s Dance*, due to the fact that no matter which ending one reads, the second ending will always be present on the opposite page and thus make it impossible to forget about its existence.

Of course, frame breaking also plays a major role in breaking up the aesthetic illusion of the narrative. The first frame-break occurs when Jess sends Alex her urgent fax in which she asks him which man she should choose. Not only is the readers’ attention drawn to this chapter because it is the first chapter which bears a caption and is thus physically distinct from the other chapters, but it is also preceded by the pages which bear no more than the names of the two men and instructions as to what the readers have to do in order to be able to continue reading. This is surely a big frame break on the level of the layout and it is then followed by the two endings, which are given parallel and thus surely break the frame of any conventional narrative with only one ending. But while frame break on the physical level of the narrative surely plays an important role, it is much less important when we come to its content. While a romantic comedy with two endings is surely exceptional, the endings themselves follow a very predictable pattern and thus do not qualify as means to break up the frame of the genre as for example the un-Victorian ending in *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* does. But there is still one more frame-break to consider. Just as in *Kerry’s Dance*, the readers are addressed directly right at the moment the narrative split takes place, and the narrator therefore crosses the boundary which separates her sphere from the sphere of the readers. The readers are therefore asked to abandon their roles as passive perceivers and to become active producers and therefore more involved in the creation of the narrative. This kind of reader-involvement does not only constitute a frame-break, but also makes the readers aware of their roles as players in the narrative. Unless they make a decision which favours one ending over another, the narrative comes to a standstill, so that it can be said that at a crucial point in the narrative the progression of the narrative depends entirely on the readers’ will to determine its course. Therefore, the readers’ participation in the narrative is doubtless an excellent means of breaking their aesthetic illusion.
5.2.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect of the endings

Just as in *Kerry’s Dance*, the multiple endings in *Love Stuck* can easily be used to heighten the readers’ aesthetic illusion because the readers are asked to take a decision for Jessica. Thus, we have a clear link between what the protagonist Jessica is probably feeling at the moment of the narrative split and what the readers are going through. Not only are both parties faced with a difficult situation which will surely confuse them and make them feel rather insecure, but both have to make an important decision the consequences of which have to be carefully considered. On a somewhat broader scale, the readers will possibly be able to identify with Jessica’s situation due to the fact that the decision between two partners is probably not completely unknown to many of the readers. What is also of great importance is the feeling of not being in control, which Jessica as well as the readers probably have because no matter what the decision is, it turns out to be the wrong one, and completely unsatisfactory for the readers as well as the protagonist.

5.3 Concluding thoughts about multiple endings in popular literature

If one were to look for parallels between multiple endings in the postmodernist avant-garde and multiple endings in popular literature, at first sight, it might seem that despite being based on the same principle, i.e. a split somewhere in the narrative and different endings resulting from it, they have very little in common otherwise. One might even be led to the erroneous conclusion that multiple endings in popular literature are everything that multiple endings in the postmodernist avant-garde are not. Where we have complexity in the avant-garde narratives, one could expect simplicity and clarity in popular literature. And where there is subtlety in high literature, one could anticipate obviousness in mass literature.

One of the factors that corroborate the erroneous belief that multiple endings in popular literature are not as complex as those found in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde is their number. The narratives discussed have no more than two endings and one narrative split, and as the endings are comparatively long if set in relation to the overall lengths of the narratives, one could be lead to assume that readers have plenty of time to rebuild their aesthetic illusion after the narrative split has taken place. When it comes to guiding readers through the different endings of the narrative, popular literature is characterised by its sheer endless abundance of visual as well as textual signposts. Both narratives in question tell the readers that there are two endings by statements on the front covers of the books, which come right next to the title and the author. Therefore, readers are already well aware of what awaits them by the time they open the book, which is a situation
greatly different to what we get in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde. Right at the moment of the narrative split, a whole range of textual as well as visual signposts are employed. Thus, in both narratives the physical structure is broken up by the insertion of either blank pages or captions, and the readers are told that they have to decide in which way they want to go on reading. But although the readers are told that the decision of one ending over another is theirs, both narratives encourage the readers to explore both endings, which later on has important repercussions on the perception of the endings as open, closed, happy and sad.

With regard to histoire, the first point that is noticeable is that in both cases the narrative split is tied to a moral dilemma. Furthermore, the narratives in question fit perfectly into the framework of the Freytag-triangle with the narrative split being located close to the climax. Moreover, all the endings manage to answer the most important questions which were raised during the narrative, and can thus be seen as closed, and also as happy endings. Talking of variation and permutation, it can be said that both narratives can be viewed as a study in variation due to the fact that there are recurring incidents, people and objects, which can be found in both endings of the narratives, although only to a lesser degree in Kerry’s Dance, and relatively extensively in Love Stuck. These recurrent scenes also make it clear to the readers that both endings are of comparable length in terms of story time.

Talking of analogies between histoire and discours, it is clear that the predominant analogy is, of course, the link between the decision that the readers have to take and the decision that has to be made by the protagonists. On a somewhat larger scale, the endings can easily be linked to a quest, although it is quite simply the quest for the right way to lead a life. But nevertheless, arbitrariness also plays a role in so far as the endings arrive at very similar conclusions regardless of the decision that the readers and the protagonists make.

As far as multiple endings as a metafictional device are concerned, various surprising issues can be found. Although it is true that multiple endings in popular literature to some extent frustrate the readers’ expectations of closure by not giving a definite ending, this effect is to a great extent abated because it seems that, in a way, the narrative needs both endings in order to give the readers satisfactory closure on the level of questions. The laying bare of literary conventions only plays a role in so far as both endings in the respective narratives follow the pattern predicted by the genre they belong to, and therefore draw attention to the fact that no matter which way the protagonist goes, the narrative still has to adhere to predetermined narratorial patterns. One point that is of the greatest importance is frame-breaking. This is due to the fact that, similarly to what we can see in literature of the
postmodernist avant-garde, the frames are broken up on various levels, but still there are some particularities in popular literature. The first thing that is greatly significant is that the physical structure of the narrative is broken up, i.e. the narrative rupture is clearly visible by only looking at the respective pages of the narratives. Furthermore, this rupture is tied to a narratorial intrusion, asking the readers to decide which way the protagonists should go. This not only merges the spheres of narrator, protagonist and reader, and can therefore be seen as a complete melt-down of narrative frames, but it also makes readers aware of their roles as players. What enhances the importance of their roles as players is the fact that unless the readers make a decision for one ending over another, the narrative cannot proceed because the readers are asked to go to a certain page in order to continue their reading. And last but not least, the multiple endings can be viewed as an analogy of arbitrariness because it seems that no matter which way the protagonists go, the outcomes of the narratives are only marginally influenced by this seemingly important decision.

When it comes to a heightening of the readers’ sense of reality, things are as clear as in the case of analogies. Thus, the readers’ quest for the right ending to the narrative can be linked to the protagonists’ search for the right ways to their lives, but, just as in real life, it turns out that very often there are no right or wrong decisions. Probably, readers will be able to identify with the characters to at least some extent because both narratives are directed to an audience comparable to the protagonists in many respects, such as age and gender. Thus, most readers of the narratives will be very well aware of what it means to have to make an important decision with possibly important repercussions, and therefore sympathize with the protagonists, which brings them one step closer to what is happening in the narratives.

And after all these things have been said, I would argue that it would be too simple to say that multiple endings in popular literature lack any kind of complexity. *Love Stuck*, in particular, is inventive as well as surprising in its structures, and can in many regards be compared to narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde. Thus, it can be argued that the peculiar structure of *Love Stuck*, which gives both endings at the same time, but on opposite pages, is comparable in its effects to the brevity and the abundance of narrative splits in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. Due to the fact that the readers of *Love Stuck* can see all the endings at the same time, there is no possibility for them to rebuild their aesthetic illusion, so they are constantly made aware of the constructedness of the narrative. Similarly, Jessica’s comment that “[t]wo wrongs make a right” (*Love Stuck* 251) can be equated to Jesse’s statement “That’s where you’ve seen us before” (*Confederate General* 115) because in both cases the characters show awareness of the fact that they have been living through more than...
one ending, and there is therefore a clear case of metalepsis. Another interesting issue is also the interaction of the endings and the fact that in popular literature the quality of one ending in many cases depends on whether the readers have read both endings, or only one. Of course, this phenomenon can also be found in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde, but it can easily be argued that it is much more pronounced in popular literature. Thus, it is clear that the last ending of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* seems much more tragic if one has read the preceding two endings, but nevertheless, it remains an open and unhappy one, so it can be said that the quality of the ending is intensified rather than changed. Similarly, the endings in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* seem much more open-ended and unstable if all endings are read, but again, any of the endings, if read in isolation, can be viewed as an open ending the quality of which is only intensified by the other endings. But multiple endings in popular literature take this much further. The quality of the endings in *Love Stuck* largely depends on the order in which they are read. The ending read first will be interpreted as a happy ending because it seems that in the end Jessica has found the man of her dreams. The second ending, in contrast, despite having a similar make-up, will nevertheless be viewed as a sad ending because by the end of it, it is clear that the second man is equally unsuitable for Jessica. But what is most important is that this knowledge will most probably lead to a re-interpretation of the first ending so that by the time both endings are read, they will both be viewed as sad and open endings. Therefore, it can be said that the quality of the endings changes completely depending on whether only one or both endings have been read, which differs greatly from what can be seen in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde. Finally, one must not forget that in both *Kerry’s Dance* and *Love Stuck* the ending read in first place always leaves significant gaps when it comes to the readers’ expectations on the level of questions. Thus, one only becomes aware of the fact that in *Kerry’s Dance* both decision will lead to a positive outcome, while in *Love Stuck* Jessica’s relationship will come a disastrous end by reading both endings. On the ground of these incidents it can be established that multiple endings in popular literature show a much higher co-dependence than multiple endings in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde.

Summing up, it can be said that multiple endings in popular literature at first sight seem to lack much of the complexity that comes from an elevated number of different endings characteristic of multiple endings in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to discard them as uninteresting or simplistic because, on closer inspection, multiple endings in popular literature can be surprisingly complex in their structures and
achieve similar surprising effects as their counterparts in literature of the postmodernist avant-garde.

6. Multiple endings in children’s narratives

There is no doubt about the fact that the traces that postmodernism has left on literature and its aesthetics can also be found in children’s literature. Children’s literature appears to be “evolving towards complexity and sophistication on all narrative levels” (Nikolajeva 207), which is also reflected by the fact that authors nowadays are not hesitant to make use of different experimental forms in children’s literature. Robyn McCallum, in his article on metafictions and experimental forms in children’s literature, presents a whole range of different experimental devices which can be found in children’s literature nowadays. The strategies mentioned range from intertextuality and parody, narratorial intrusions as well as disruptions, to devices like *mise en abyme* structures and multistranded or polyphonic narratives (401ff). Postmodernism does not only influence the structure of children’s books, but also their content. The values transmitted to children through literature have changed dramatically so as to reflect the post-industrialist societies we live in, as well as the social changes and problems prevalent today (Colomer 107). A very good example of this change can be found in the description of families. While some decades ago the portrayal of big rural families consisting of various generations was in the foreground, we can find nuclear or even single parent families in today’s children’s narratives (Colomer 116). New topics, previously considered inappropriate for children, such as illness, death and disabilities, have been introduced into children’s literature so as to be able to make children understand that conflicts as well as pain are an inevitable part of life (Colomer 111). In view of all these developments it does not seem surprising that multiple endings can also be found in children’s books from the late 1980s onwards.

For various reasons it has been decided to include two narratives which were originally written in German into this chapter. In the case of *Milo and the magical stones*, it can be argued that the narrative can also be seen as part of the Anglophone literary scene of children’s books due to the fact that the narrative was translated into English only a short time after its publication in Germany. Although the same does not apply to *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin*, it has been decided to include the narrative because it is an excellent example of a children’s book that displays a stunning complexity in its endings. Generally, the incorporation of narratives written in languages other than English also bring home to us the fact that narrative with multiple endings are by no means a phenomenon

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confined to Anglophone literature alone, but that they can be found in literature of different languages as well.

6.1 Emily Gravett, *Wolves*

Emily Gravett’s *Wolves*, which was published in 2006, is directed at children from the age of four. As most children are not yet proficient readers, or completely unable to read at such early an age, the narrative relies heavily on pictures and uses the written word only very sparingly to give a rough plot outline. Therefore, it can be categorised as a picture book, defined by Perry Nodelman as “a combination of verbal texts and visual signs” (70). This contrapuntal relationship, the combination of two different systems of representation, has, according to Robyn McCallum, a clearly metafictive potential (400), which is very well exploited by the author. Content-wise *Wolves* can be classified as an animal story due to the fact that its two protagonists are animals and that these animals behave like human beings. Thus, a little rabbit decides to go to a library to read a book about wolves, and finally meets the animal it has been reading about when the wolf steps out of the book.

6.1.1 Description of the endings

6.1.1.1 Discours

Emily Gravett’s *Wolves* offers the readers no more than two endings, which are of equal length. Neither of them takes up more than two pages, which at first glance seems to be very little, but appears to be a reasonable length in view of the fact that the narrative which precedes the narrative split does not take up more than sixteen pages. The two endings are given one after the other, and the readers only become aware of the fact that there is also a second ending after the narrative has been brought to a close for the first time. This is due to the fact that in terms of visual signposts *Wolves* has very little to offer the readers. The only explanation we get comes in the form of a piece of text after the first ending and makes the readers aware of the fact that they are about to encounter a second ending to the narrative. It states that this ending is geared towards more sensitive readers, but it does not give any hint towards when in the course of the narrative we can situate this ending. Thus, the readers have to turn the page to find out that the second ending sets in after the first encounter of the two animals. What is very interesting about the second ending is the fact that its layout is somewhat different from the first ending. The animals seem to have been torn from a piece of paper and re-arranged in a new formation on a blank page. In this way, the second ending is

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clearly differentiated from the first because it does not only appear to be an additional ending, but rather a re-working of the first ending. Nevertheless, we can say that, on the whole, *Wolves* does not provide its readers with a lot of visual information to orient them and to show them at which point in time the second ending starts. Still, there should be no problems of orientation for the readers due to the fact that it is clear that the second ending comes right after the final merging of the spheres of the two animals because it is the only picture in which the animals have the same ontological status. This is made clear by the fact that they face each other, i.e. the rabbit is aware of the wolf’s presence, which is not the case before metalepsis takes place, so that readers will be able to find out at which point in the narrative the second ending is situated without any additional help.

### 6.1.1.2 Histoire

From the point of view of the plot, *Wolves* is a relatively simple narrative. The protagonist, a rabbit, goes to a library to read a book about wolves (interestingly also entitled *Wolves*). While the rabbit is reading the book, the realms of the two animals start to merge until the wolf finally steps from its sphere into the sphere of the rabbit in a process of metalepsis and the rabbit has to face the wolf it has been reading about. The moment when the wolf crosses the line, which is the moment when the narrative split takes place, is doubtless the climax of the narrative if we want to place it in the framework of the Freytag-triangle. Thus, the rabbit’s going to the library can be seen as the inciting moment which triggers the rising action, which in this case is the merging of the spheres of the two animals, and finally leads to the climax. Nevertheless, *Wolves* does not fit perfectly into this frame due to the fact that the endings are too short to be able to comprise the falling action as well as the catastrophe. We could even go so far as to say that the first ending, in which the rabbit is eaten by the wolf, does not contain any falling action, but leads us directly to the catastrophe, i.e. the death of one of the animals. The second ending, in contrast, does not contain any catastrophe, but the falling action as well as the positive conclusion of the narrative.

Described in terms of happy and sad ending, *Wolves* is quite easy to analyse. It is clear that the first ending is what we can term the sad ending because it ends with the death of the rabbit. The second ending is clearly the happy ending because it draws a picture of a world in which both animals can live together peacefully. When it comes to a description of the two endings in terms of closed and open endings, things become more intricate. On the level of expectations, readers will first notice that they are reading an animal narrative directed at children, and will therefore expect the narrative to end happily, i.e. with the two animals...
living together peacefully. Yet, it becomes clear rather early that the mood in this narrative is much darker than in other animal stories and that something dangerous is going to happen. This tension is intensified by the fact that the readers seem to know more than the rabbit, i.e. that they are aware of the danger, while the rabbit is completely unaware of what might happen to it. Therefore, it can be said that both endings in a way grant the readers satisfactory closure on the level of expectations. While the first ending satisfies the expectations of the readers who sense the dark mood of the narrative and thus expect the narrative to end in a catastrophe, the second ending is geared towards the group of readers who expect animal stories for children to come to a happy conclusion. In this regard, Wolves might even be compared to Kerry’s Dance because it seems that the narrative is so contradictory in nature that it needs two endings in order to be able to grant satisfactory closure for all the different readers. On the level of questions, the situation is very similar. In this case, the question which has to be answered is, “What is going to happen to the rabbit?”, and both endings give an answer to this question, although it has to be said that the second ending is much more explicit in giving this answer than the first ending. Although it is clear that the narrative has a negative outcome in the first ending, there is no description of the rabbit being eaten by the wolf, but two different snapshots of the animals, one taken before the event and one after the event, and a bit of text from which readers can draw their own conclusions. Right before the first ending we can see a small white rabbit clinging to the book it is reading about wolves. Judging from the puzzled and scared look on its face as well as its ears, which stand on end, it seems to be aware of the fact that something dangerous is going on. Behind that rabbit, practically taking up all the space on the page, we can see the dark fur and the two furious eyes of the wolf focussing on the rabbit, which has its back turned to the wolf. The piece of text, which comes with the picture on the right-hand side of the right page, reads, “Wolves eat mainly meat. They hunt large prey such as deer, bison and moose. They also enjoy smaller mammals, like beavers, voles and...” (Wolves n.pag.). If the readers then turn the page, they get a picture of the book the rabbit has been reading before, and a torn and crumpled piece of paper, obviously containing the last word from the previous page. The book is in a dreadful condition. It has a torn and battered aspect and bears marks, which probably come from sharp claws and thus indicate that some fight has occurred. The slip of paper torn from the book contains the single word “...rabbits” (Wolves n.pag.). Thus, as previously stated, readers do not get any detailed description of what happens to the rabbit, but have to make their own inferences from the information given to them. The second ending, in contrast, is just the opposite in this respect. The rabbit comes back to life and makes friends with the wolf, which
turns out to be a vegetarian. The rabbit no longer seems unaware of the wolf’s presence and has not turned its back on it but rather faces it directly and without fear. Furthermore, the readers do not have to draw too many conclusions for themselves because everything is stated explicitly. We get a picture of two animals facing each other and a piece of text which reads, “Luckily this wolf was a vegetarian, so they shared a jam sandwich, became the best of friends and lived happily ever after” (Wolves n.pag.).

If we want to describe the two endings in terms of variation or permutation, we will notice that the second ending does not seem to be merely an additional ending to the narrative, but that it can be regarded as a re-writing or re-construction of the first ending. This becomes very clear from the last picture. What differentiates this picture from all the pictures we encounter earlier in the text is that the animals seem to have been torn out of the original book and re-constructed on another background. While at the beginning of the narrative the animals seem merely to be drawn unto a sheet of paper, in the last picture their features have torn and battered rims, such as you get if you try to rip the animals out of the paper they are originally drawn on. Furthermore, it seems that parts of the animals, such as ears or paws, have been attached separately to the body. The second ending is therefore a clear re-construction of the first, an attempt to make amends. Instead of writing a new ending, the author seems to have taken the old ending and re-shaped it into a more positive one.

6.1.1.3 Interaction between discours and histoire

In spite of the very different nature of Wolves and The French Lieutenant’s Woman, there are surprising parallels between the narratives when it comes to discussing possible analogies. In order to link the narrative split to moral dilemma, we would have to turn to the wolf instead of the rabbit because it depends entirely on the wolf’s decision to eat or not to eat the rabbit. Nevertheless, this is not a very convincing parallel. Just like in the case of the last two endings of The French Lieutenant’s Woman, the wolf is seen as “the other” from the point of view of the readers as well as the protagonist, so that there is no way of knowing why in one ending it should eat the rabbit, while in the other ending it should decide to make friends with it. Thus, both the nature and the order of the endings seem to be entirely dependent on chance and can therefore be regarded as an analogy of arbitrariness.

What also has to be kept in mind is the role of the narrator in this context. The narrator makes it very clear that she has decided to include the endings in this way because she is aware that some readers might not like unhappy endings. In this way, the ultimate decision of the fate of the rabbit therefore depends on a decision that the narrator makes, meaning that the
most important link is not to be found between the structure and the plot, but between the structure and the narrator.

6.1.2 Functions of the endings

6.1.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

As far as breaking up the readers’ aesthetic illusion by frustrating their expectations of closure is concerned, *Wolves* is an extraordinary example because the situation that the readers are faced with at the end of the narrative can be interpreted in different and contradicting ways. First of all, it is, of course, possible to conclude that the readers’ expectations will be frustrated due to the fact that nobody will expect a children’s book to have two endings. But what also needs to be considered is the fact that *Wolves* is so complex a narrative that it even needs to have two different endings in order to be able to satisfy all the readers’ different expectations which are conjured up during the first pages. This is also intricately linked to breaking up the readers’ aesthetic illusion by laying bare the literary conventions of a narrative. It is clear that a negative ending will break the conventions of children’s narratives, which mostly try to present the world as a happy and peaceful place. But what is more, the narrator seems to mock the readers’ expectations by giving them a second ending, which conforms to the pattern one expects in children’s narratives, and moreover claims to have written this ending only for the benefit of very delicate readers who need a happy ending. In this way, the narrative clearly points to the readers’ preconceptions and expectations, and breaks them only to be able to re-shape them into the ending expected by the readers.

Frame-breaking also plays an extremely important role in *Wolves* due to the fact that, when the narrative split takes place, no less than three different frames are broken at the same moment. If we want to stick to a temporal order of the different frame-breaks, the first break which needs to be mentioned is the frame which separates the rabbit from the wolf. At the beginning of the narrative, the two animals do not belong to the same ontological sphere, with the wolf being only a fictional character from the point of view of the rabbit. Yet, a mere couple of seconds before the narrative fissure occurs, this frame is broken, and the wolf steps into the same world as the rabbit and eats it. This first frame-break is then followed by the second and most important break in the narrative, i.e. the narrative itself is broken up only to begin anew two pages later. What is closely linked to this second frame-break is a third frame-break in which the narrator decides to address the readers directly. Not only does the narrator step down from her superior position as the narrating instance of the narrative, but
this doubtless also entails the empowerment of the readers, who from this moment on become aware of the fact that they can actively opt for or against one ending and thus become producers rather than perceivers. It seems that one could even go so far as to say that right at this moment there is a complete breakdown of boundaries between different levels because not only do the rabbit and the wolf meet in the same ontological sphere, there is also a breakdown between the levels of the readers and the narrator, who build a new ending for the narrative together. In view of all these frame-breaks, we can therefore conclude that frame-breaking is of the greatest importance in this context and certainly very effective in breaking up the readers’ aesthetic illusion.

Another metafictional device which needs to be discussed in this context because it comes in combination with the two endings, is the snippet between the two endings in which the narrator tells the readers what is going on. Not only does this piece of text name the author and address the readers directly, it moreover overtly states that what the readers are dealing with is nothing but a work of fiction. Thus, the narrator informs the readers, “The author would like to point out that no rabbits were eaten during the making of this book. It is a work of fiction. And so, for more sensitive readers, here is an alternative ending” (Wolves n.pag.). Despite the brevity of this message, it contains a whole range of interesting features. The first important issue is the instance of authorial intrusion in the first sentence. The self-reference of the author clearly breaks the aesthetic illusion of the narrative which has been built up until this point, and could furthermore be seen as another instance of metalexsis. By bringing herself into the narrative, the narrator clearly makes a statement about her power within it. She is the one who is in charge of what happens in the narrative and does not hesitate to tell the readers as much. Yet, when the author appears in the text she partly comes to defend herself, thus giving up some of her power. With the statement that no animals were hurt during the making of the book, she brings an implied reader and his possible fears or worries into play. This mentioning of the reader culminates in the last sentence, where the author explains that the second ending is intended for readers of a delicate nature. By mentioning the implied reader at the end of the short piece of text and making it clear that not only she is in charge of how the narrative is going to evolve, she makes a concession to the readers and their roles in the reading of the narrative. Moreover, the second part of the first sentence is clearly intertextual, as it alludes to the often used phrase, “No animals were hurt during the making of this movie”, which can frequently be found in the final credits of motion pictures in which animals play a leading role. By making reference to other pieces of artistic text, this sentence clearly draws attention to the narrative’s status as an artifice, a construction, which is also
further substantiated by two factors. First of all, the sentence “It is a work of fiction” (Wolves n.pag.) gives substance to the narrative’s status as a construct, and secondly, we must not forget the visual form in which the piece of text comes to us. In a cut-and-paste-manner the piece of text has been torn from a larger sheet of paper, it has been ripped from its original context, no matter where it may have originated, and then pasted onto the blank yellow-brown pages. Here, again, the status of the text as an artifice is brought home to us very clearly, as the author does not even bother to erase the traces of her construction work.

6.1.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect of the endings

As has been discussed earlier, there are a few analogies to be found between the narrative’s structure and its content, and therefore, it is also worth investigating how far these analogies can be extended to the readers. In Wolves, there is no theme of a quest which could link the realm of the animals and of the readers, but there is another common denominator, and this is the feeling of confusion as well as insecurity that both the rabbit and the young readers have to face when reading the narrative. What both the readers and the rabbit have in common is their presumed innocence and their being confronted with a medium, which, at first glance, seems innocent and merely seeks to bring enjoyment as well as information. But both have to discover in due time that books do not necessarily behave the way they are supposed to behave, and that they can in a way be dangerous. In both levels there is a rupture, i.e. the boundary separating the rabbit and the wolf breaks down, as well as the boundary between the readers and the narrator, and both are confronted with a previously unknown as well as potentially frightening situation. It is exactly this situation of being betrayed by the good old and hitherto safe book and the being put into a situation which is new for the rabbit as well as the readers that links the spheres of the rabbit and the readers and thus brings them slightly closer to each other.

6.1.2.3 The didactic value of the endings

Keeping in mind the fact that there is still a great emphasis on the didactic nature of children’s literature, it might be relevant to ask what kind of values the young readers are taught through the two endings. As mentioned before, contemporary children’s literature does not back away from difficult topics a main one of which can surely be found in different types of conflicts. These conflicts should teach the readers to consider conflicts as an inevitable part of life (Colomer 111). What is happening in the case of the rabbit and the wolf is a complex conflict caused their very different nature, and it only depends on the agency of the two
protagonists to turn a negative situation into a positive one. Furthermore, we could regard the two endings as a very consummate example of the breaking up of old values in favour of new ones, as is now frequently portrayed in children’s literature. Since WWII, children’s literature has been used to further the understanding and mutual acceptance between different cultures (Colomer 121). Due to a variety of factors, most of us live in multicultural societies in which the positive co-existence of different groups is not always easy. We often have to live together with people who are just as different from us as the wolf is from the rabbit. Nevertheless, there have to be ways of finding a consensus which makes living together possible, if not altogether agreeable. The two endings in Wolves show the readers that the possibility of a peaceful life of different races is possible on condition that both parties are ready to give up some of their old habits. If each group stays absolutely true to itself and is not willing to look for a solution, the result will surely be disastrous, but if both sides are willing to give up at least some of their habits, a positive life together is surely possible. If the wolf were to continue his old lifestyle as a dangerous animal that eats smaller animals, it is clear that it would be impossible for the two animals to live together without endangering the rabbit. But this wolf has decided to give up part of its old habits, it has decided to be a vegetarian and therefore is able to live together peacefully with the rabbit and even to make friends with it.

6.2 Markus Pfister, Milo and the Magical Stones

Marcus Pfister’s Milo and the magical stones was first published in Germany in 1997 under the title Mats und die Wundersteine. Despite the narrative also being directed at readers between the age of four and eight years, it seems to cater for a slightly older readership than Emily Gravett’s Wolves. This becomes very clear from the fact that the book relies much more heavily on text than on pictures in telling the narrative, but nevertheless, pictures do play an important role. Thus, only every other page contains text and never more than three to five lines at a time. On the pages containing text, the text does not come separately, but is inserted into the picture, making it clear that there is a strong bond between the text and the illustrations. Although the illustrations do not extend the narrative line of Milo and the magical stones, they are still of great importance because they give all the details concerning Milo’s looks as well as his surroundings which are not given in the text proper. Therefore, it is justified to call the book a picture book, which naturally enhances its metafictional potential due to the interaction between pictures and text. In addition to classifying the book as a picture book it is, of course, an animal narrative, telling the tale of the little mouse Milo, who

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finds a magical stone on the hill he lives on, and promptly goes to tell his friends about his discovery. In one ending, the text describes the ways in which the stones, which give the mice warmth and light during the bleak winter months, are used to comfort the mice, while they are the driving force for greed, animosities, and the destruction of the mice’s habitat in the second ending.

6.2.1 Description of the endings

6.2.1.1 Discours

*Milo and the magical stones* only has two different endings, which are of exactly equal length in terms of discourse time. Both endings comprise a space of twelve pages half of which are entirely filled with illustrations, while the other half contains the text. This length is quite considerable in light of the fact that the narrative preceding the narrative split does not take up more than twelve pages either. Thus, the two endings are just as long as everything that comes before them, and therefore of considerable importance to the whole of the narrative. This equality in length already points to certain equality in importance in the endings, which is further enhanced by the fact that no order is imposed upon the endings, i.e. both endings are given at the same point in the narrative. This is achieved by the extraordinary physical structure of the book. From the narrative split onwards, the pages containing the endings are physically cut into an upper and a lower half, containing the sad and happy endings respectively. Still, one could argue that readers will be likely to follow the traditional western order of reading, which goes from top to bottom of the page, so there is still some kind of order that the endings follow. Nevertheless, this is probably as close as any narrative comes to achieving real equality for its endings as far as the physical structure is concerned. What is also special about the structure of the narrative is the fact that, apart from Susie Gilmore’s *Love Stuck*, it is the only narrative which allows the readers to read the two endings at the same time. This, of course, allows very direct comparisons between the endings, but bearing in mind the amount of confusion that such a reading would probably cause especially in young readers, it is very questionable as to whether any reader will really follow this path.

Visual signposts to help the readers navigate their way through the two endings are by no means abundant, but they come quite early in the narrative. The readers are already made aware of the fact that the narrative they are going to read will contain two endings by a sentence on the front cover of the book which comes right next to the author and the title telling the readers that *Milo and the magical stones* is “A book with two endings by the author
of *The rainbow fish*. In the narrative itself, visual signposts are fairly scarce. Right after the narrative split we do not get any explanation as to what has been happening, but merely a page cut into two halves with the first half bearing the title “The happy ending” and the page underneath called “The sad ending” (Milo n.pag.). This textual explication is further underlined by two pictures. While the first page shows a happy mouse, the second ending displays two mice that walk away angrily. Apart from this device, there are no further signposts, such as an authorial intrusion or a repetition of the same sentence or even set of sentences, yet, considering the physical structure of the book, we can conclude that these devices would be superfluous anyway. A repetition of the same set of sentences so as to situate the readers should they decide to read both endings is unnecessary because they would have to physically go back to the point of the narrative split in case they decide to read the second ending after having finished the first one. They therefore catch a glimpse of what happens right before the split, due to the fact that the page right opposite the endings shows the most important point in the narrative. It can be assumed that this is done intentionally because it is the only point in the narrative at which both pages, the left-hand side as well as the right-hand side of the page, contain text, while in the rest of the narrative only one side of the pages contains text with the other just providing illustrations. Thus, we can conclude that due to the structure of the book, the readers are very well oriented when it comes to situating them at the right point in time before reading the endings, making the other devices obsolete.

6.2.1.2 Histoire

In spite of the fact that *Milo and the magical stones* is a rather short narrative, it fits perfectly into the framework of the Freytag-triangle. The first pages of the narrative are dedicated to the description of Milo’s life and the lives of the other mice, and can thus be viewed as the introduction. Action starts to develop when Milo finds a magical stone inside the mountain, which gives the mice plenty of warmth and light and bears the promise of bringing an end to their hardships. The mice are not quite sure yet what they should make of the stone, when a very old mouse called Balthasar starts to lecture them about the danger of taking things away from the earth without giving anything back in return. This can be seen as the inciting moment of the narrative, which triggers the rising action, and it is precisely at this moment that the narrative split occurs. Thus, the split into different strands of narrative is not only tied to a moral dilemma, which in this case is also the decisive turning point in the narrative, it is also situated at a narratorial kernel, proving to be the inciting moment of the narrative. Both endings then comprise a rising action, which in one ending is a description of
how the mice learn to employ the stones for their own comfort without doing any damage to the mountain, as well as the climax and the conclusion, which is in this case a big celebration in honour of the stones and the good turn that the lives of the mice have taken. In the sad ending, the rising action consists of the exploitation of the mountain in search of the stones, the greed and growing animosities between the mice, which is followed by the climax and the catastrophe, the destruction of the mountain.

The classification of the two endings into happy and sad ending is, of course, quite simple in the case of the narrative in question. Of course, the ending entitled “The happy ending” (Milo n.pag.) offers us a conclusion to the narrative in which the central conflict has a positive outcome, while in the sad ending, the conflict has the upper hand and brings devastation to the protagonist and his companions. In the happy ending the mice follow Balthasar’s advice as well as Milo’s good example. Whenever they take a magical stone from the mountain, they put another stone, which they have especially embellished for this occasion, in its place. Therefore, the mice only take as many stones as necessary, enough to provide them with warmth and light during the winter months, but not so many as to endanger the mountain. In they end, they are able to benefit from the stones while they are sitting together as a community every evening, and even have a great celebration each year which shows their gratitude for the stones and for the fact that they are able to live in such a great place. The sad ending, in turn, goes in the opposite direction. The mice do not listen to Balthasar and become greedy. Each of them tries to get as many stones as possible, so that in the end, they take so many stones away from the mountain that one day a big wave comes and destroys the mountain. Thus, the mice have not only lost their wealth, but also their friends and their home. The final scene then shows Milo and Balthasar sitting together in a hole and pondering on how much they could have benefited from the magical stones had their companions been somewhat wiser.

A description of the two endings as open and closed endings is equally straightforward. On the level of questions, the readers will want to know what will happen to the stones and how the mice will use them. On this level, both endings grant the readers satisfactory closure because both endings tell the readers in detail what happens to the mice as well as the stones, and the consequences this behaviour has for the animals. On the level of expectations, matters are a bit more intricate. First and foremost, the readers will expect an animal narrative for children to end happily, but surely the titles of the endings also raise certain expectations in the readers. If we are to assume that readers are to expect a happy ending to the narrative simply because they are used to being given a happy ending at the end
of an animal narrative, only the first and happy ending will yield satisfactory closure. But then, there might also be readers who sense the problematic situation that the stones have put the mice in and the many problems they can cause, and so might be more inclined to opt for an ending in which this problem is talked about. Therefore, it depends very much on the readers and their expectations as to whether both of the endings can give the readers satisfactory closure on the level of expectations.

If we are trying to describe the endings of *Milo and the magical stones* in terms of variation or permutation we are very likely to fail. Apart from the fact that in both cases the development depends on one crucial decision, the two endings develop into two totally different directions one of which has absolutely nothing to do with the other. Thus, the two endings cannot be described as variations of the same scenario, but rather of totally different scenarios which just happen to have the same starting point.

6.2.1.3 Interaction between *discours* and *histoire*

In *Milo and the magical stones* the first analogy which can be drawn between the structure and the content of the narrative is clearly one involving a moral dilemma. When the mice are confronted with the stones, there are basically two paths they can choose. They can behave in a considerate manner and use the stones for their own well being, or they can allow themselves to get carried away by their darker sides and risk the destruction of their habitat. Therefore, it can be argued that the two endings in the narrative can certainly stand for the dilemma that the mice are going through when encountering the stones, and that the two endings stand for the two paths they can choose. As far as extended metaphors are concerned, the theme of the quest doubtless again plays an important role. In this case, it is the quest for the right way in which to use the stones and to benefit from them as much as possible without doing any damage to the mountain.

Nevertheless, there is also the possibility of interpreting the two endings as an analogy of arbitrariness. This is due to the fact that in both endings Milo does exactly the same thing, i.e. he tries to behave responsibly towards his environment and even tries to teach the other mice to follow his good example. However, his friends only follow his example in one ending and are thus able to lead a happy and peaceful live, whereas in the other ending, the mice disregard Milo’s warnings and destroy their homes. This clearly points to the fact that although the individual does have some agency in shaping his environment, there are also much greater forces at play and that the individual might not be able to ensure a good outcome for any situation despite his efforts. Therefore, arbitrariness does play a role in *Milo*
and the magical stones because it seems that Milo alone is completely unable to prevent the destruction of the mountain when all the other mice around him act greedily. Why the mice should follow Milo’s example in one ending and completely ignore him in the other ending is not made abundantly clear in the narrative and can therefore be ascribed to a certain arbitrariness.

6.2.2 Functions of the endings
6.2.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

As far as breaking up the aesthetic illusion of Milo and the magical stones by frustrating the readers’ expectations of closure is concerned, there are two issues to be kept in mind. On the one hand, one must not forget that the structure goes counter to the readers’ expectations of closure simply by going into two different directions at the end, but, what is more, the unhappy ending also goes counter to the expectations of those readers who think that an animal narrative necessarily has to end happily. What is of the greatest importance, though, is the fact that the multiple endings break up the readers’ aesthetic illusion by drawing attention to certain narratorial conventions pertaining to children’s stories. The first convention questioned in this way is doubtless the convention that stories for children must end in a positive way. In Milo’s narrative there are two endings, a happy and a sad one, which are both of equal importance as far as their length and order are concerned, and are both credible endings to the narrative. Thus, the author stresses the fact that sad endings should have a position equal to that of happy endings. What is intricately linked to this is the behaviour of the mice. Although Milo remains a shy and lovable mouse throughout the whole narrative, his friends are ridden by the same vices that very often govern human beings. The mice become greedy, they exploit their homes without thinking of the consequences, and are no longer the innocent animals we expect to find in animal stories. Therefore, the sad ending challenges many preconceptions of children’s stories and thus very effectively draws the readers’ attention to them.

Another factor which is of great significance is frame-breaks. Just as in most other narratives which have been discussed so far, the frame-break does not only occur on one level, but still Milo’s narrative is an exceptional one because the structure of the book is also broken up physically. This is also the rupture which is first visible to the readers, but there are ruptures which occur slightly earlier, and therefore have to be discussed first. The first rupture in Milo and the magical stones does not really split the narrative into two different narrative strands, but actually brings the narrative to a standstill. After the mice have walked away, the
narrative is not continued immediately, but stops for a moment and confronts the readers with the pages which are split into two halves and bear the captions “The happy ending” and “The sad ending” (Milo n.pag.). This means that before the narrative can continue, another frame-break has to occur. The readers have to give up their roles as perceivers and become producers of the narrative, i.e. they have to make a decision as to which narrative they are going to read. This jump of the readers into the narrative can be described as a case of metalepsis. This device is of great importance due to the fact that the readers are made aware of the fact that they are active co-producers of the narrative. Unlike in the case of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* or *A Confederate General from Big Sur*, in which the narrative proceeds even if the readers never opt for or against one ending, the narrative telling Milo’s story comes to a complete standstill unless the readers decide to read either the happy or the sad ending. In order to be able to make this decision they have to take into consideration the captions of the endings which have been provided by the narrator who, in giving the readers a hint towards what is going to happen at the very end of the ending, has again broken a frame by jumping to the end and telling them what will happen later without really following a chronological sequence. What is of the greatest importance when it comes to the physical split of the pages is the fact that, just like in *Love Stuck*, the structural make-up of the book makes the readers unable to forget for even a moment that there is also a second ending because they can see it at all times while reading the first one. Therefore, it is doubtless justified to say that frame-breaks in general, and the physical split of the pages into two halves in particular, are extremely effective as well as important when it comes to breaking up the readers’ aesthetic illusion.

6.2.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect the endings

In *Milo and the magical stones* there is a clear link between the readers of the narrative and its protagonist. Both are confronted with something that they cannot quite place within their framework of experience, but while in the case of Milo it is the magical stone, the readers are faced with a somewhat magical book. What both, the protagonist as well as the readers have in common in this regard is the feeling of uncertainty, which comes with the new situation and the unknown item. Just as Milo is trying to figure out what to do with the magical stones, how to assess them, and how to use their potential in the best and most friendly way possible, the readers will probably be trying to find out what to do with a book which gives them more than one ending. Both things are novelties, meaning that the dilemma
that Milo as well as the readers are going through can surely be seen as an analogy, taking the readers one step closer to the narrative.

6.2.2.3 The didactic value of the endings

One of the most interesting things about the values transmitted in *Milo and the magical stones* with the help of the two endings is the fact that those values can be read in a traditional or in a postmodernist way. As is already made clear on the back cover of the book, the narrative should serve to teach readers that their behaviour can be of crucial importance in determining the future of our planet. This teaching of respect for the environment is surely a very traditional value, which has been taught to children for many centuries. Nevertheless, this concern seems of renewed interest especially today. As many children’s books also aim at providing some criticism of our postmodernist societies and their flaws (Colomer 118f), Milo’s narrative could also be read as such. The sad ending certainly bears important traces of the behaviour we often witness in our post-industrialist societies. Without taking into consideration the damage and the environmental as well as social consequences that the exploitation of their home might have, the mice start to exploit the mountain and end up homeless in a destroyed environment, which is sadly reminiscent of the behaviour and attitudes of postmodern societies towards the planet. What is especially painful is the clarity with which one knows right from the beginning which part of the narrative is going to end happily and which part is going to end sadly. The readers know right from the beginning that if they decide to read the ending entitled “The sad ending” (Milo, n.pag.), the conclusion is going to be a sad one, just as it is clear that the exploitation of the planet is going to lead to its destruction. What is also portrayed very nicely in the narrative is how the inconsiderate behaviour of the mice does not only affect their physical environment, but also the social structures. While they end up having reunions and enjoying each other’s company in the happy ending, the sad ending does not only entail the destruction of the mountain, but also the growing separation of the mice from each other. This is made very clear by the last two pictures of both endings. While in the picture of the happy ending you can see a group of mice having a celebration together, in the second ending you find Milo and Balthasar alone in a cave. Thus, the narrative also shows the social consequences which inconsiderate behaviour towards our planet can have.
6.3 Christine Nöstlinger, *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin*\(^9\)

*Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* was published in 1987. Unlike the other two children’s narratives discussed previously, the narrative of the penguin caters for a much older readership since the narrative relies entirely on text in order to tell the story and to give the descriptions which would have been expressed in pictures in the other two narratives. Furthermore, with more than one hundred pages of length the narrative is a rather extensive one, so it can be concluded that readers should at least be ten to twelve years of age in order to be able to read the narrative successfully. The plot of the narrative centres on young Emanuel, a nine-year-old half-orphan who leads a rather quiet and ordered life with his father and grandaunt until a little penguin steps into his life. As Emanuel loves penguins more than anything else in the world, it is clear that his neighbour’s little penguin will be allowed to move to his house when his neighbour decides to move to a country considered too hot for a penguin. From this moment on, things start to get difficult. Not only does the penguin fall in love with the cat of an old woman living nearby, but the low temperatures which have to be kept inside the house so as to make it agreeable for the penguin do not only disturb Emanuel’s father, but also his new girlfriend, Emma Edlinger. Finally, Emanuel also has to experience being in love for the first time when he meets a substitute teacher who bears striking resemblance to his late mother.

6.3.1 Description of the endings

6.3.1.1 Discours

*Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* has three endings as well as a post-script. The endings are given one after another and labelled roughly according to their content. Thus, we get one ending entitled “Vom traurigen Ende für fünf Menschen und zwei Tiere” (Pinguin 84), another ending called “Das total geschwindelte Ende der Geschichte für fünf Menschen und zwei Tiere” (Pinguin 88), and a third one with the caption “Die Abschlussarbeit von Emanuels Vater” (Pinguin 95). As far as discourse time is concerned, it can be noticed that the length of the endings increases steadily. The readers receive a first ending with only four an a half pages, a second ending which comprises seven and a half pages, and a third ending which takes up 19 pages altogether. The post-script, in contrast, is comparably short and does not take up more than half a page.

As for visual signposts which help the readers as an orientation, the captions of the endings surely play an important role. As has already been stated above, the first ending is


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called a sad ending and the second ending is called a totally invented ending, so that the
narrative tells the readers very explicitly that they are simply reading an ending to the
narrative. The third ending, in contrast, is only called “Die Abschlussarbeit von Emanuels
Vater” (Pinguin 95). In spite of the fact that this phrase does not contain the word ending, it
nevertheless points to the fact that it is one possible ending to the narrative because it is
mentioned that Emanuel’s father does some work which will lead to the conclusion of the
narrative. But what is even more important than the captions are a series of narratorial
intrusions into the narrative. Already two pages before the endings start, the readers are made
aware of, and in a way prepared for, the fact that the narrative is about to come to a close
because the narrator begins a lengthy discussion on the nature of endings in narratives. Thus,
she states that each narrative has to come to a close in some way because you cannot just stop
a narrative in medias res without having found a suitable conclusion for the protagonists. So,
the narrator explains to the readers,

Irgendwie, das weiß ein jeder, muß man seine Geschichten zu Ende erzählen. Man
muß zu einem Schluß kommen! Man kann nicht einfach irgendwo aufhören und
beaupten: So, das war das Ende! (Das wäre ein Betrug.)

Man muß sich ordentlich um die Leute – und natürlich auch um die Tiere –
kümmern, die man in die Geschichte hineingebracht hat. Nicht um alle freilich. Den
zoologischen Assistenten Schestak […] den brauchen wir nicht mehr. […] Der war
uns bloß als Lieferant für den Pinguin wichtig, so wie wir die dicke alte Person vom
Tierheim als Katzenzubringerin brauchten. […]

Wichtig sind für uns:
Emanuel, der Herr Bierbauer und die Großtante Alexa.
Emma Edlinger.
Der Pinguin.
Und dann sind noch sehr wichtig:
Die sehr dicke, alte Katze, weil sie vom Pinguin geliebt wird. Und die
Aushilfslehrerin mit den sieben Sommersprossen und den himmelblauen Augen, weil
Emanuel sie liebt.

Für fünf Menschen und zwei Tiere müssen wir also einen Schluß finden, mit
denen müssen wir zu einem Ende kommen. Und da müssen wir uns wiederum fragen,
was möglich ist. (Pinguin 82f)

Then, the narrator goes on to explain that life is sometimes very sad and that therefore
the narrative could take a sad outcome. Following this statement, the sad ending is given. But
after the sad ending has been brought to a close, the narrative is again interrupted, and the
narrator states that readers who like sad endings can now stop reading, but that she is aware of
the fact that many readers do not like sad endings, but need happy endings to be fully satisfied
with a narrative. But as this will hardly be possible without lying, the second and happy
ending is called a totally invented ending. At this point, the narrative resumes, and after
having been brought to a happy close is again interrupted by the narrator, who states that for
readers who like happy endings the narrative has now come to a close and they can stop reading. But as there are also readers who like happy, but nevertheless realistic endings, there will be a third ending. Then, she goes on to explain that it is not a good idea to rely on lucky coincidences to bring the narrative to a realistic but happy close, but that one of the characters has to do something clever, and after having discarded all other protagonists for various reasons, decides that the character most suitable to do something clever is Emanuel’s father, so the last ending will be about the final work that this character has to do to bring the narrative to a close. Therefore, it can be said that the readers are very well oriented due to the extensive nature of the narrative intrusions, which are reminiscent in scope as well as subject matter of the narrative intrusions in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, with the only difference being that readers know beforehand which type of ending they are going to read and when the ending starts.

6.3.1.2 Histoire

Placing the narrative of Emanuel and his penguin in the framework of the Freytag-triangle is reasonably easy. Right at the beginning of the narrative, all the major characters are introduced, and we get some explanation as to the nature of their relationships, so this part can be regarded as the introduction. The inciting moment comes with the penguin, as well as Emanuel’s falling in love with the substitute teacher, while all the action triggered by these characters and the ensuing problems can be regarded as the rising action. When the narrative split occurs, all of the protagonists are facing some kind of difficulty which they wish to overcome and which might potentially turn out for the better or the worse, so the narrative split is placed at a narratorial kernel and only a very short time before the climax. The penguin is trying to get near the cat, Emanuel’s father has to decide whether to marry Emma Edlinger or to leave her for the sake of Emanuel, Emanuel’s grandaunt has to make up her mind as to whether she will stay at the house of her grandnephew, and Emanuel is suffering because the substitute teacher has disappeared and left a great void in his life. The first ending then contains the climax with Emanuel’s dad marrying Emma Edlinger and grandaunt Alexa leaving the family. In the second ending, the climax comes when everybody is happily reunited and the narrative concludes on a more positive note, which is more or less the same in the third ending.

A description of the endings in terms of happy and sad is rather straightforward at first glance, but becomes intricate as soon as one moves to the third ending. In the first ending, which is aptly entitled the sad ending, things take a turn for the worse. Emanuel’s dad marries
Emma Edlinger in spite of the fact that she will probably neither be a good mother for Emanuel nor a suitable companion for Emanuel’s dad. This distresses the protagonist so much that he becomes an introverted and sad child, and from this moment on has to see a psychotherapist regularly in order to come to terms with the situation. Emanuel’s grandmaunt feels that she is no longer needed or wanted in the house, and decides to move to a retirement place despite the fact that she would prefer to stay at the house of Emanuel. The two important animals in the narrative have to face a very bleak future, too. The cat dies when it is trying to escape from the penguin, and the penguin simply disappears after his terrible encounter with the cat. The second ending, which can be labelled as a happy ending, is the complete opposite of the first ending. Emma Edlinger leaves Emanuel’s father because she has met another man she feels more comfortable with, so the relationship between these two people ends without the usual drama, which had been feared by Emanuel’s father. Emanuel finds his substitute teacher when she takes a walk near his house, and when Emanuel’s father sees the young woman he is reminded of his wife and promptly falls in love with her and she falls in love with him. In the same encounter, grand-aunt Alexa finds out that she is needed as well as welcome in the house and decides to stay with the rest of the family, and last but not least, the animals are also satisfied because the cat recognises the substitute teacher as the girl she once belonged to and therefore stops feeling sad and lonely, and the penguin is happy because it is able to be near the cat. The third ending, then, can in some ways be described as an amalgamation of the first two endings because it contains happy as well as sad elements. Nevertheless, it rather leans towards being a happy ending because it seems that despite things not being perfect for everyone, all of the protagonists are to some extent satisfied with the way things have worked out for them. Emanuel finds his substitute teacher, but only after his father has taken the narrative into his own hands and appeared at her door in order to ask her if she wants to be Emanuel’s private teacher. The young woman promptly agrees to take the job and after some time she gets so close to the family that she decides to move into their house. She also gets along really well with grandaunt Alexa, and furthermore gives the old women the feeling that she is being needed so that she also stays at the family house instead of moving to a retirement place. Emanuel’s father finally splits up with Emma Edlinger when he realizes that she would not make a very good mother for Emanuel and that his son is still the most important person in his life. Although Emma is not exactly pleased with the course things have taken, she leaves the house without making any trouble and is never seen again. Last but not least, the two animals learn to get along with each other in spite of the fact that they do not necessarily become the closest of friends. So we can say that although the last
ending seems to be at least slightly more realistic than the happy ending because there are still conflicts and some people, like e.g. Emma Edlinger, do not necessarily get what they want, it is still a very happy ending because all of the central conflicts are resolved in a positive way. In this way, the third ending is very similar to the endings in Kerry’s Dance because it also draws a rather positive, but nevertheless realistic picture of the future.

As far as the description of the endings in terms of closed and open endings is concerned, it is very clear that all of the endings are closed endings on the level of questions because the narrator is very careful not to leave any strings untied for the most important characters. This is already made very clear right from the beginning when the narrator states that she has to find an adequate ending for all of the animals as well as the protagonists because it would not be right to leave questions open. On the level of expectations, the question as to whether the endings can be regarded as open or closed largely depends on the angle from which the question is viewed. If we are to assume that readers expect to find a happy ending in a children’s book, the first ending will most probably be regarded as unsatisfactory. Nevertheless, it has been stressed before that nowadays, children’s books aim at giving a rather realistic picture of life and do not shy away from tackling difficult topics, meaning the first ending can also be regarded as a closed ending. The narrator herself stresses repeatedly that the different endings simply cater for the different tastes of the readers so we can conclude that it will largely depend on the readers if one ending or another will be viewed as closed on the level of expectations.

6.3.1.3 Interaction between discours and histoire

First and foremost, it is possible to regard the endings as being linked to the dilemma that Emanuel’s father is going through. The future well being of his son as well as of the grandaunt and the penguin depend largely on the decision that Emanuel’s father has to make. If he marries Emma, both Emanuel and the grandaunt will be unhappy, and if he does not marry his girlfriend, he runs the risk of being unhappy for the rest of his life himself. The title of the last ending, which is called “Die Abschlussarbeit von Emanuel’s Vater” (Pinguin 95) clearly shows that the ending of the narrative lies in his hands and that, although it might not be easy and he might not be able to please everyone, he has to make a decision which takes into account his own life as well as the life of the others. Thus, the three endings can also be seen as being indicative of the confusion and insecurity that Emanuel’s father is going through. But it has to be kept in mind that just as Sarah is seen as “the other” in The French Lieutenant’s Woman, Emanuel’s dad can also be regarded as “the other” in the penguin.
narrative. In this way, the endings can again be interpreted as an analogy of arbitrariness because it is not really clear why in one ending he should marry Emma, while in the other ending, he splits up with her because he realizes that she will not be a good mother for his son. Speaking of extended analogies, the quest again plays an important role. This is particularly visible because just before the narrative split takes place, all of the important characters are facing some kind of difficulty and looking for a way to get out of their troubles. Therefore, it is also possible to link the narrative split to the quest for a solution to the problems that the characters are facing.

And finally, just as in *Wolves*, the roles of the narrator as well as the readers have to be taken into consideration. This is due to the fact that the narrator makes it very clear that she writes different endings in order to cater for the different tastes of the readers, so there is also a clear link between the narrator’s decision to give different endings for different readers and the ultimate outcome of the narrative.

6.3.2 Functions of the endings

6.3.2.1 The metafictional potential of the endings

When it comes to a discussion of the readers’ expectations of closure in the narrative, it can be said that the narrator uses the three endings very cleverly in order to break with certain narratorial conventions. She first poses a sad ending, which doubtless draws attention to the fact that we mostly expect to find a happy ending in children’s literature. Then, she gives the readers a thoroughly happy ending, only to be able to tell them that happy endings are rather unrealistic and never actually occur in real life so that ultimately, she has to place a more or less realistic ending. Thus, the narrator plays around with the readers’ expectations by pretending to simply be catering for different tastes in different readers, and in this way lays bare literary conventions.

As far as frame-breaking is concerned, the most important frame-breaks are the various narratorial intrusions in which the spheres of the narrator and the readers are merged because the narrator decides to discuss narratorial issues with the readers. In this way, the readers are made aware of their roles as players as they change places and become active producers who are asked to choose one ending for themselves. Furthermore, these passages are clearly a meta-comment on the narrative, since it is overtly stated that what the readers are given is no more than a narrative the outcome of which depends entirely on what the narrator wants to do with the characters. A rather minor feature which nevertheless seems to be of great importance in this respect is the last sentence of the introduction to the endings, which
states, “Das traurige Ende der Geschichte könnte so sein” (Pinguin 83). What is noticeable here is the use of the word könnte, which points to the fact that the ending that follows is only one version of many possible ones and can therefore not be regarded as the one and definite ending. This is underlined by the fact that the sad ending is not entitled as the sad ending, but that the caption reads, “Vom traurigen Ende für fünf Menschen und zwei Tiere” (Pinguin 84). This again stresses the fact that we are not dealing with a definite ending, but that what we are reading can be regarded more as a suggestion, which merely points in the direction that a sad ending could take. A similar thing also holds true for the happy ending which is called “Das total geschwindelte Ende der Geschichte für fünf Menschen und zwei Tiere” (Pinguin 88). This caption again points to the fact that what we are dealing with can neither be regarded as a definite ending nor as the truth because all of it is invented. The only caption not questioning the ontological status of the ending it presents is the last one called “Die Abschlussarbeit von Emanuels Vater” (Pinguin 95). So we can say that at least the titles of the first two endings point towards the fact that neither of the endings can be regarded as the one and definite ending of the narrative, and therefore clearly attack the reader’s aesthetic illusion.

And now let us turn to what is called “Wichtige Nachschrift” (Pinguin 113), which says,


The post-script is one of the most astonishing parts in the whole narrative, not only because the narrator puts the narrative which she has told up to this point sous rature in no more than two sentences, but also because this passage is reminiscent of the narratorial intrusion after the first ending in The French Lieutenant’s Woman. Furthermore, the narrator also tells the readers that in case they did not like the narrative they should simply change it themselves. One very important word in this context is the word ‘gefälligst’. This word underlines the imperative that the narrator puts on the readers’ creativity and their importance in making the narrative. It seems as if the narrator was tired of being the only person responsible for the narrative and therefore orders the readers to create their own narrative. Nevertheless, she instructs the readers on how to adapt the narrative so as to suit their expectations, which she says is not difficult at all. A minor, albeit, important detail is also that
the narrator refers to the narrative as a physical entity by telling them to erase the letter on page five, which, of course, again draws attention to the text being an artefact.

6.3.2.2 The illusion-heightening effect of the endings

As stated earlier, there are various analogies between the plot and the structure of the narrative, and these analogies tend to point in totally different directions. But what is quite striking is the fact that no matter which way we want to read the analogies, either way they contribute to enhancing the readers’ sense of reality. In case we want to regard the multiple endings as both an analogy of the arbitrariness of life and literature, we can draw a clear parallel between what the protagonist is going through, as well as what the readers are going through. The readers might feel just as helpless as Emanuel when they are first confronted with this new situation and thus there is a clear connection which can be used to bring the readers closer to the text. But, on the other hand, the multiple endings can also be seen as indicative of the agency of people, who have the power to put things in totally different directions, and make them turn out for the better for themselves as well as their surroundings. In this case, there is a clear parallel between the readers and Emanuel’s father. In spite of the fact that he is not the protagonist and that therefore people are probably less likely to identify with his character, he is of great importance for the narrative because his decisions greatly influence its course. In this way, he has the same agency as the readers, who also have the choice between different paths they can follow to shape the narrative the way they want to.

6.3.2.3 The didactic value of the endings

As far as didactic values are concerned, Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin is an exceptional example in many respects. First of all, it has to be noted that the first two endings rely on the same good-bad binary opposition which can also be found in Wolves and Milo and the magical stones. The first ending makes it very clear to the readers that the world is not always a happy place and that even young people are confronted with a lot of problems. What is also very interesting to note in this respect is that at the beginning of the narrative, Emanuel is a very happy child although his mother is dead since his father and his aunt give him all the love he needs. But as soon as his father marries again and his aunt moves to a retirement place, he becomes extremely sad because he misses his aunt and does not like his stepmother, although he now lives in a rather traditional family. Thus, the narrative shows that sometimes children are happier in a patchwork family than in a traditional family which has only been built for the sake of convenience and to conform with
the standard. Although the second ending is a happy ending, the narrator makes it clear from the very beginning that purely happy endings can hardly ever be found in real life and that therefore, a happy ending will have to be a totally invented ending. Nevertheless, she cautions readers that one should not lie to other people, but that in this case it is okay for her to lie because she admits to it right from the beginning. Therefore, the children’s attention is again drawn to the fact that life hardly ever offers completely happy endings. The third ending is surely the most interesting ending in this respect because it can be described as a merge of the first two endings. Emanuel’s father fixes the situation as best as he can so that although not everybody is blissfully happy, most characters are rather content with their lives in the end. In this respect, the third ending of the narrative can be compared to the two endings in *Kerry’s Dance* because all the endings show the readers that important decisions always have benefits as well as trade-offs, and that it is extremely difficult to come to a conclusion in which all is well. Again, it can be noted that Emanuel is a happy child in the third ending in spite of the fact that he does not live in a family which conforms to the traditional norms of society.

What is also of the greatest importance is the fact that by reading the three endings, the young readers can also gather much information about narratology and the art of bringing the narrative to a satisfactory conclusion. The narrator explains in detail why stories have to be brought to a conclusion, and why one has to find an ending for some characters, while other characters can be disregarded. By going through all of the characters and explaining why they are so important as to deserve a proper ending, or why they are only of limited importance, young readers can very well learn to distinguish between minor and major characters in a narrative in a funny and interesting way. Furthermore, the readers are encouraged to adapt the narrative to suit their own tastes. What is important in this respect is the fact that the narrator gives the readers hints as to how it is possible for them to adapt the narrative or to cancel it out altogether, so that readers are given active help in order to be able to adapt the narrative to their own liking.

### 6.4 Concluding thoughts about multiple endings in children’s literature

Although the relatively small number of endings in the narratives discussed in this chapter might lead to the conclusion that multiple endings in children’s literature lack a certain complexity, one will soon become aware of the fact that this thought is as premature as it is wrong. Multiple endings in children’s literature show a high degree of complexity not only in their structures and contents, but above all when it comes to using them to break up the readers’ aesthetic illusion.
Despite the fact that the children’s books discussed do not offer more than two or three endings, one could assume that they are structurally rather similar to multiple endings in popular literature. But on closer inspection, one will soon become aware of the fact that the very opposite is the case. Due to the fact that both the endings in *Wolves* and *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* are comparatively short, readers are given little time to rebuild their aesthetic illusion after the first narrative split. Furthermore, Christine Nöstlinger’s narrative undergoes further splits because towards the end there are alternations between the endings and comments on the endings, making it necessary to further split up the narrative structure. The structure of *Milo and the magical stones* is such that the readers are always forced to see both endings at the same time, so that again there can be no re-building of aesthetic illusion. All of these devices are, of course, reminiscent of the techniques used in *A Confederate General from Big Sur* as well as *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, which leads to the conclusion that in this regard, the narratives are structurally much more similar to narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde. It might be expected that a complex structure also asks for an abundance of devices to orient the readers, but again, just the opposite seems to be the case because the narratives only give the information which is strictly necessary in order to be able to guide the readers through the reading experience. Nevertheless, children’s books seem to be very inventive when it comes to using visual signs. Thus, *Wolves* makes the last ending seem like a makeshift ending in which the animals have unprofessionally been torn from their original places and re-arranged in the new ending. *Milo and the magical stones* decides to give both endings at the same time by cutting the pages in two halves and, last but not least, *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* does not merely give a happy and a sad ending but presents the readers with a totally invented ending, a very sad ending and a realistic ending. Another interesting feature of the narratives is the fact that in two of the three cases, the narratives only pretend to give the readers a choice between different endings, while actually pre-structuring and selecting them. On the surface it seems that the narratives provide different endings which are geared to a specific readership. Thus, *Wolves* offers an ending for sensitive readers, and *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* gives different endings for different tastes in the readers. Nevertheless, we must not forget that in both these narratives the endings are given in a particular order chosen not by the readers but by the narrator. This has two important effects on the reading of the narratives. On the one hand, the endings are much more co-dependent on each other. The second ending of *Wolves* could not exist without the first ending because it is nothing more than a re-shaped version of the first ending. Equally, the last ending of the penguin narrative is no more than a fusion of
different features of the first two endings, which are discarded by the author as the real ending of the narrative for being either too unrealistic or too sad to fit into a children’s book. The only narrative which really offers the readers a choice of one ending over another is *Milo and the magical stones*, which gives both endings at the same time and therefore makes the only serious attempt at leaving the choice to the readers.

When it comes to discussing the *histoire*, things are much more straightforward. As children’s literature also serves a didactic purpose, there is a clear tendency towards giving a happy and a sad closed ending with the outcome entirely depending on a decision that the characters make. Interesting to witness, though, is the development from stories where the multiple endings are based on this simple binary opposition to a more complex distribution of values leading to the inclusion of a third ending in the last narrative discussed. This last ending represents a kind of fusion of the two extremes and therefore points to the fact that life is too complex to be seen in simple binary oppositions. It seems that at some point, a simple binary opposition is no longer sufficient as an explanation for the children, but that another solution has to be found in order to make the narrative acceptable for young readers. This striving for a new, complex solution can be seen as an indication of the tendency to try to educate children in the complexities of life. And again, variation and permutation play an important role in this regard. In all the narratives the protagonists are placed in similar scenarios, but depending on their decision, the scenarios can be regarded as being either positive or negative variations of the same situation. Speaking of analogies, it is noteworthy that in neither of the narratives discussed, there is an analogy between a moral dilemma or decision of either of the protagonists, but that is seems that all the protagonists are faced with situations the outcome of which they cannot really influence no matter how hard they try. The decision as to how the narrative will come to an end is always linked to a character other than the protagonist, and as this character is perceived as “the other” from the readers’ as well as the protagonists’ perspective, the endings are to be seen rather as an analogy of arbitrariness.

All of the narratives discussed display a high metafictional potential, which is achieved by a whole variety of different techniques. First and foremost, a series of narratorial intrusions in which the narrators address the readers directly and even go so far as to discuss narratorial issues and their reasons for putting more than one ending to the stories. Furthermore, the readers are asked to decide for themselves which ending they want to read and so are made aware of their roles as players in the narrative. And finally, it has to be kept in mind that the narratives display certain structural peculiarities which again attack the readers’ aesthetic illusion and are very reminiscent of the techniques which can already be
witnessed in narratives of the postmodernist avant-garde. Thus, the readers of *Milo and the magical* stones see both endings at the same time and are therefore constantly made aware of the narrative split. Similarly, the endings in *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* are so short that readers are given very little time to re-build their aesthetic illusion after the first narrative split, which is rather reminiscent of the endings in *A Confederate General from Big Sur*. And lastly, the narrator of *Die Geschichten von der Geschichte vom Pinguin* decides to erase the narrative altogether, just as Fowles erases the first ending of his narrative. Illusion-heightening only plays a role in so far as the protagonists of all of the narratives are just as confused by the situation they are put in as the readers will be confused by the narratives they are reading. What is of the greatest importance in this respect is certainly also the feeling of both parties of not being in control of what is going on. Just as the protagonists of the narratives can only try their best and hope for a positive outcome while having to rely on the guidance of their elders and friends, children also experience a feeling of complete helplessness and a lack of power while having to rely on their parents.

As far as didactic values are concerned, it is important to notice that the endings of the first two narratives in discussion are based on a simple good-bad binary opposition. If the characters in the narratives behave responsibly towards each other and are ready to make compromises instead of only looking for their own benefits, the stories have a positive outcome. Nevertheless, the third narrative also incorporates a third ending which does not really fit either description. Although it tends towards being a happy ending, there are also certain things which do not quite turn out the way that the protagonists would like them to, so that it seems that from a certain point onwards a simple binary opposition will no longer do to explain the complexities of life to children, but children also have to be made aware of the fact that although one might try to bring a narrative to a happy conclusion, life is never perfect and there will always be things that one does not like.

Summing up one can say that narratives for children and adolescents which contain multiple endings have a great didactic value for their readers since they can teach children a lot about the complexities of life in a postmodernist, post-industrialist society. One of the most important thoughts nowadays is that children have to be educated so as to be able to deal with the growing complexities of life. It seems that in our world there are no longer fixed ways leading to comfortable solutions to different kinds of problems which occur during our lives (Colomer 110). Lives and problems are complex and so are their solutions. It seems that this is the most important message that young readers can gain from reading narratives with multiple endings.
7. Conclusion

I always wanted a happy ending… Now I’ve learned, the hard way, that some poems don’t rhyme, and some stories don’t have a clear beginning, middle and end. Life is about not knowing, having to change, taking the moment and making the best of it without knowing what’s going to happen next.

Gilda Radner

In spite of the fact that, more than 2300 years ago, Aristotle defined a whole as “that which has a beginning, middle, and end” (15) and that his definition still plays an important role in our conception of art, and even of life itself, it seems that we have come closer to Flann O’Brien’s vision than he himself might have anticipated in his wildest dreams. But rather than exchanging one principle for another, many authors in discussion have managed in an admirable way to fuse the two principles, to write narratives with a beginning, a middle, and many ends, which nevertheless manage to function as a whole, a unity which cannot simply discard of any of its endings. Aristotle’s principle has neither been abandoned nor breached, it has merely been extended so as to be able to incorporate the one dream we have as human beings, namely to be able to return to the passages that did not turn out the way we wanted them to, and to re-do them, re-shape them into something more convenient and satisfactory for ourselves and for others.

What this proves is not that literature is becoming less mimetic, but that it has finally dared to display the world we live in as the chaotic, unstable and often incomprehensible place that it is perceived as by the postmodern subject. It seems that narratives have stopped pretending that the world is an ordered place where words like “truth” refer to stable and unalterable entities, and have finally managed to do justice to the complexities of the postmodern world we live in. And fortunately, this new and daring attitude of literature towards a more realistic portrayal of life is not restricted to the sphere of so-called “high” literature, but can be witnessed in many different genres which cater for readers of very different age groups and even backgrounds. Therefore, this fortunate development is not one for the chosen few, but open to readerships of very different kinds.

But after all, it has to be kept in mind that due to the limited scope of this paper and the ensuing restrictions as far as the number of works tackled is concerned, some vital questions have remained unanswered. We therefore do not know which role multiple endings play in canonical literature nowadays, although there are numerous examples, such as Amélie Nothomb’s Mercure and Keith Hatchick’s Hungry Ghost. Furthermore, there has been no possibility of discussing the differences of multiple endings in short narratives such as Robert

http://www.quotationspage.com/search.php3?homesearch=gilda+radner
Coover’s “The Babysitter”, B.S. Johnson’s “Broad Thoughts from a Home” or Jeffrey Archer’s “One Man’s Meat”. And one last concept the validity of which it would have been interesting to test is Brian McHale’s distinction between “metafictional” or “non-metafictional” endings (101f). In the analysis of *The French Lieutenant’s Woman*, serious doubts were raised as to the validity of such a distinction, due to the fact that the metafictional potential of the so-called non-metafictional ending was just as high and important as the metafictional potential of the other two endings.

But despite all of these shortcomings, one vital question has been answered because it seems that after the previous analysis, it can be said that narratives with multiple endings are not the end of the Aristotelian principle, but that they are merely an extension of it. Narratives can have a multiplicity of endings and still function as a whole, and one could even go so far as to claim that many of the narratives would be less complete, they would not be a whole in the way they are if it were not for the different, and often contradicting endings they offer. Therefore, it can be concluded that although some sceptics still seem to believe that we have come to the end of literature itself, we only seem to have come to the end of literature that only pretends to be able to portray real life without doing any real justice to the complexities of life. For this reason, the demise of so-called “realistic” literature is not to be mourned because it enables people to enjoy a newer and richer kind of literature, or as Mitch Albon puts it, “[A]ll endings are also beginnings. We just don’t know it at the time” (1).
8. Bibliography

8.1 Primary Literature:

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http://www.quotationspage.com/search.php3?homesearch=gilda+radner
German Abstract


Abschließend gilt es noch festzustellen, dass die Bewegung hin zu mehr Enden keineswegs darauf hindeutet, dass die Literatur sich dieser Tage nicht mehr der wahrheitsgetreuen Darstellung der Welt widmet. Stattdessen kann man zu dem Schluß kommen, dass die Literatur es sich endlich zutraut, die Welt als den ungeordneten, chaotischen, und manchmal Angst einflößenden Raum darzustellen, der sie letztendlich auch ist.
Lebenslauf
Gabriele Maria Neuditschko

Persönliche Daten

| Geburtsdaten: | 16. 10. 1983 in Waidhofen/Th. (Niederösterreich) |
| Nationalität: | Österreich |

Ausbildung

| 1990-1994 | Besuch der Volksschule Groß-Siegharts |
| 1994-2002 | Besuch des Bundesgymnasiums Waidhofen/Th. (Matura mit ausgezeichnetem Erfolg) |
| seit Sept. 2002 | Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik an der Universität Wien mit Wahlfächern Spanisch und Französisch |
| Sept. 2006 - Juni 2007 | Studium der Anglistik und Amerikanistik sowie der Wahlfächer Spanisch und Französisch an der Universitat de Valência im Rahmen des Erasmus Studierenden-Mobilitätsprogramms |

Forschungsreisen

2003: 2-wöchige Forschungsreise in die Vereinigten Staaten zum Thema Route 66 and the Desert Southwest mit einer Exkursionsgruppe des Instituts für Anglistik und Amerikanistik der Universität Wien unter der Aufsicht von Univ.-Ass. Privatdoz. Mag. Dr. Astrid Fellner (Universität Wien) und Dr. Timothy Conley (Bradley University, Peoria, IL)

Sprachkenntnisse

| Deutsch: | Muttersprache |
| Englisch | ausgezeichnet in Wort und Schrift (Auslandsaufenthalte, Studium) |
| Spanisch: | ausgezeichnet in Wort und Schrift (Erasmus Auslandsaufenthalt, Studium) |
| Französisch: | sehr gut in Wort und Schrift (Studium) |
| Katalanisch: | Grundkenntnisse (Auslandsaufenthalt) |
| Gebärdensprache: | Grundkenntnisse (Kurs am Sprachenzentrum der Universität Wien) |

Berufserfahrung

| Juli/Aug. 2004 | Ferialpraktikum im Bereich Passenger Service bei Austrian Airlines Österreichische Lufverkehrs AG am Flughafen Wien/Schwechat |
| seit Sept. 2007 | Freelance Assistant Event Coordinator bei Eli Lilly Regional Ges.m.b.H. |